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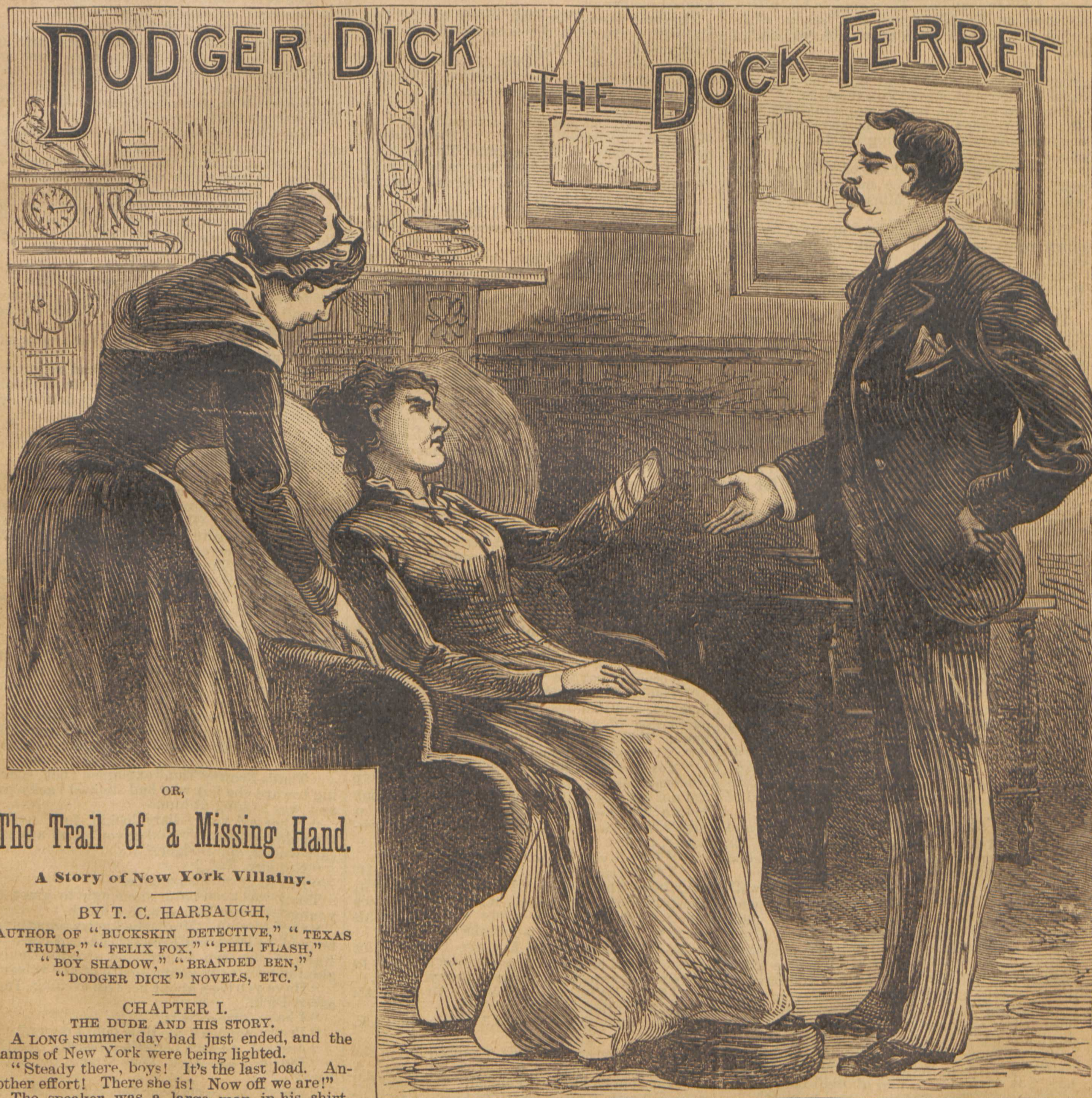
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OR,

The Trail of a Missing Hand.

A Story of New York Villainy.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,

AUTHOR OF "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "TEXAS TRUMP," "FELIX FOX," "PHIL FLASH," "BOY SHADOW," "BRANDED BEN," "DODGER DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUDE AND HIS STORY.

A LONG summer day had just ended, and the lamps of New York were being lighted.

"Steady there, boys! It's the last load. Another effort! There she is! Now off we are!"

The speaker was a large man in his shirt-sleeves, and during the whole afternoon his voice had been heard on one of the west side

"I REFUSE TO GO ANOTHER STEP IN THIS HORRIBLE SCHEME. IT IS INFAMOUS. GIVE ME BACK MY HAND. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH IT, MURIEL JEFFERS?"

docks where he had superintended the loading of a lot of heavy boxes.

The men who had worked with a will gave a slight cheer as the last box settled itself on the big truck.

They were glad the work was done.

"Here comes the help we've been looking for all day!" suddenly one stevedore exclaimed, "Jupiter! isn't he a daisy!"

"Muscle like a watch, too, isn't he, Tom!" responded another. "Look at that cane. Wouldn't knock a sparrow off a curb. Wonder if he eats?"

"Eats? You ought to see him in a ten-cent restaurant!" and the crowd laughed heartily.

"Step back there, Pennell. If he runs against you with full steam on you'll never load another truck!"

The subject of this badinage was now near at hand. He was a person calculated to attract attention anywhere, being to all outward appearances, a genuine city dude.

He wore a soft gray suit with a very subdued plaid for a pattern. His scarf was a loose flowing tie of a delicate mouse color, without a pin. On his feet were high-buttoned alligator shoes, and he carried a thin stick with a bit of deer horn for the handle. To complete his attire, he wore an English rough and ready white straw hat, with a wide cream-colored band of silk.

Such was the character who came toward the group of men, and who had been the innocent cause of the rough stevedore's remarks.

The dude was not handsome; while his face was well formed, his eyes lacked expression, while the manner of carrying his head was calculated to excite ridicule.

"Ain't you going to get out of the way, Pennell?" exclaimed one of the men to the fellow, who seemed to plant himself in the dude's path.

The answer was a grin, accompanied by the mischievous twinkle of a pair of deep-brown eyes.

On came the dude, and just when he reached Pennell, a heavy boot went out and a quick cry followed.

The next moment there was a subdued laugh, for the dude had pitched forward, nearly onto his head, and lay at full length on the ground, his hat and cane some distance away.

"That was a little rough, Pennell."

"Rough?" echoed the stevedore, glancing contemptuously at his victim. "I hate the whole generation of them. They toil not, neither do they spin, confound 'em! I'd like to serve 'em all that way, I would!"

By this time the fallen dandy had picked himself up, apparently not much the worse for his mishap.

Turning upon the group of men when, he had recovered hat and cane, he singled out Pennell, and the next moment he came forward with some animation in his eyes.

"Pennell, you'll be crushed. Look out!" laughed one of the men.

But the dude did not intend to bring on a collision. He halted about ten feet from the man who had tripped him, and looked steadily at him for several seconds, when he whirled on his heel and started off.

He was followed by a laugh and a sally of uncomplimentary remarks, and Jack Pennell was congratulated over his "narrow escape."

"He'll know you hereafter, Jack. He took a mental photograph of you ere he went away."

"Let him photograph and be hanged!" was the answer. "His head isn't big enough to contain a thought of a man o' my size," and Pennell drew his figure up like an athlete proud of his physique.

Meantime the dude was out of sight, and Pennell and his companions turned from the dock as the truckman whipped up his horse and moved off with the last load.

"That was a mean trick!" exclaimed a well-built boy, who watched the men for a moment. "Don't I know that it's just like you, Jack Pennell? That boot of yours will get you into trouble some of these days. I don't like these spider-legged dudes myself, but they've got a right to live like the rest of us, and you have no license to trip 'em with that foot o' yours just because you can. You run things with a high hand when you see you can, but you'll come down a notch or two before long."

Ten minutes later this boy on entering a room not far from the scene of the dude's mishap, was surprised to find himself face to face with a person he had not expected to meet.

It was the dude himself.

"Aw! here you are at last, Mr. Dick," exclaimed the young man. "They said I would-

n't have to wait long for you, and they knew for once. You don't know me, I presume. Then look at this card," and the boy took a bit of gilt-edged, cream-colored pasteboard from the dude's hand.

A glance at the card showed the name, "Eustace Tracy Collins," printed in running script across it.

The boy looked up.

"I've been wanting to see you for some time," continued the dude.

"See me? Ain't you mistaken, Mr. Collins?"

"No. You are Dick Sly, sometimes called Dodger Dick, a n't you?"

"I'm nobody else."

"Then, you're the very person I'm looking for."

The young wharf detective wondered what was coming next.

"I had a mishap coming here," Collins went on, with a faint smile. "One of the brutes of the city tripped me with no regard for my neck. Never mind, Jack Pennell, the day of retribution will come."

"Ah! you know the man who tripped you?" exclaimed Dodger Dick, surprised.

"I ought to know him! But that is not what fetched me here."

The dude moved his chair closer to the boy, and with a glance at the door which was shut, continued in a lower key:

"I've come to you, Dick, because I don't want to deal with the men detectives. I have a singular case if you will take hold of it. Are you busy now?"

"Not busy, but not very anxious to go on a new trail," answered the boy. "I like the docks more and more every day, and Mother Sturgeon, my guardian angel, as she calls herself," here the young sleuth smiled, "doesn't want me to play ferret any longer."

"But you will help me; I know you will," and Tracy Collins leaned forward and grasped Dick's arm.

He was more excited now than when he had been thrown to the ground by Jack Pennell's boot.

He trembled and looked imploringly at the boy, who waited quietly for him to proceed.

"I was strolling through Central Park yesterday evening and had turned toward the Fifth avenue entrance, when I saw a carriage driving toward me. I do not know *why* I stopped, for there was nothing particularly attractive about the rig, but I dropped upon a settee and waited for the vehicle to pass. It came along presently, between me and one of the Park lakes. I was partly concealed by the lower limbs of some trees about my seat, and the occupants of the carriage could not have seen me."

"When the party was near, the door on the opposite side of the vehicle opened and something was thrown into the lake. I saw the object, which was quite small, strike the water, and the next moment a fish seemed to drag it out of sight. All at once the carriage started off at a lively gait, and was out of sight in a jiffy. I left my seat and went to the water, for something was floating on the surface near the edge. What do you think I found, Dick?"

There was a smile at the young man's lips, and he waited a moment for his auditor to hazard a guess about the "find" in the Park.

"You could not guess it in twenty trials," he laughed, and then his face suddenly assumed an expression of seriousness. "I found a human hand. Think of it, Mr. Dick—a human hand!"

"A very singular find," answered the boy.

"Yes, and what adds to the mystery, it was a woman's hand at that," continued Collins. "I did not get to see the people in the carriage, but before it drove away from the lake, I heard a man's voice, and, if I am not mistaken, a woman's, too."

"Where is your prize?" asked Dodger Dick.

"You did not think I'd come here without it?" exclaimed the dude. "It speaks for itself, Dodger Dick, and though it's not a very nice thing for a gentleman to be carrying in his pockets, I have it in mine, all the same."

As he concluded, Mr. Eustace Tracy Collins dived a hand into one of his pockets, but only to change color and utter a startling cry.

"I have lost it!" he exclaimed. "Great Scott! what shall I do?"

"Try your other pocket," suggested Dick, quietly.

"No, it was in this one, wrapped up in the same paper I found it in. It is not here. A thousand curses on Jack Pennell! The hand fell from my pocket when he tripped me. Can it be found?" and the young man sprang up and bent excitedly toward the Dock Ferret. "We can't afford to lose it. There is a chance of finding it

yet. Come! we must go back to the docks. I'm interested in the severed hand. A deep crime has been committed. You'll not refuse to help me, will you, Dodger?"

"No," replied the boy. "I confess that you have interested me. We will take the back trail, but the chances are that the hand will never be seen again."

Then the little room was deserted.

CHAPTER II.

GETTING A CLEW.

CONSIDERABLE time had elapsed between the dude's unfortunate encounter with Jack Pennell on the dock, and his departure from Dodger Dick's quarters in search of the missing hand.

Tracy Collins was much excited as he hurried along, accompanied by the young detective. He was eager to reach their destination.

During the walk Dick had time to study the young fellow, who appeared to be about twenty. He thought at first that he had never seen him before, but the longer he looked at him the more settled became a sudden belief that they had met somewhere.

"See here! didn't I once run against you on the Battery?" suddenly demanded Dick.

"Do you think so?" smiled Tracy.

"Yes, I do think so. By Jupiter! I am sure of it. I recollect I was after a man I had suddenly discovered, and when I started I didn't look out for you or anybody else. I believe you went down, almost head over heels, Mr. Collins. You weren't hurt, I trust?"

"Not a bit of it. I broke my cane, that was all. Did you catch your man?"

"Didn't I, though?" and Dick's eyes snapped. "I was in too much of a hurry just then to apologize, which I do now with all my heart."

"That's all right. I forgave you long ago, for I saw the collision was accidental on your part. I think we are the better friends for it."

Dick said "yes," and had a better opinion of Mr. Eustace Tracy Collins from that hour.

"If he wasn't a dude I'd like him a great heap better," murmured the boy. "He's the last person I expected a mystery from. But, here we are, back where he had his little fracas with Jack Pennell."

Dodger Dick saw that Tracy had recognized the scene of his encounter with the muscular Jack, for he had quickened his gait, and his eyes beamed with irrepressible eagerness.

A minute later the young dude showed Dick the exact spot of his fall, and the two boys began to look around for the severed hand.

"It is gone; I know it is!" exclaimed Tracy, disconsolately. "You were right, Dick; somebody has picked it up, if some dog has not carried it off. May Old Nick take Jack Pennell! If I had the brute here, I'd pitch him into the river without ceremony."

The idea of Tracy Collins performing such a feat was enough to make Dick smile despite the gravity of the situation, but, he was careful not to let the dude see him.

A thorough search of the ground in the lamp-light failed to bring the missing hand to light.

"I'm afraid we'll have to give it up," remarked Collins, at last. "If I had only not met Jack Pennell, all would be well, but I presume I had to encounter the wretch."

Just then a boy, little more than half-clad, ran out of a grimy-looking house across the street, and pronounced the young spotter's name.

"That's Frowsy Tad," explained Dick, springing toward the boy who had stepped back a pace and was looking at him.

"What ar' you fellars lookin' for?" queried the unkempt rat. "You haven't lost any gold cart-wheels, eh, Dodger?"

"Not any, Tad."

"But the jood has, mebbe."

Tracy was good-natured enough to greet the youngster's appellation with a laugh.

"Call him up. Maybe he knows something," he said to Dick, but Frowsy Tad had come forward of his own accord, and stood with arms akimbo before the young sleuth of the wharves.

"Have you been about here all evening, Tad?" asked Dick.

"I have, sure as rats."

"Pretty much all the time out of doors?"

"Jess so! Streets better'n a beastly room."

"Did you see Jack Pennell trip my friend here?"

"Didn't I?" exclaimed the boy. "He went down like a bar'l o' sugar."

"And, like a barrel, almost staved my head in," observed Tracy.

"Well, Tad, have you heard of anything being found hereabouts since then?"

"Something valuable?"

"Yes; mighty valuable to the owner."

"Money?"

"No; something worth more than dollars."

"I b'lieve something was found, right about yonder," and Tad pointed to the left.

The two boys started—Tracy the most perceptibly.

"Who found it?" asked Dick, while the dude held his breath for Tad's reply.

"Do you have to know?"

Tad addressed the question to Dodger Dick, ignoring young Collins entirely.

"I want to know," Tad, and the Dodger's hand encircled the dock urchin's arm as he leaned forward and dropped his voice to a lower key. "You're not going back on me now, are you, Tad?"

"I don't like to," said the boy, hesitatingly.

"You know, Dick, that I've helped you once or twice before—"

"That you have, and you did it well, too. Now, don't give me the cold shoulder because the ones heretofore have been warm. Who found anything on the wharf since sundown?"

"It was Kidd Gauntlet."

A slight ejaculation was Dick's reply.

"Who was it?" asked Tracy, leaning quickly forward. "I did not catch the name."

"I'm talking to the Dodger," responded Frowsy with a look of contempt. "I don't take no stock in joods. They can't stand up when they run ag'in' a match. Yes, Dodger, something was found by Kidd Gauntlet."

"Was he alone?"

"When he found it, yes."

"What did he find?"

"Something wrapped up in paper."

"In whitish paper?" inquired Tracy.

"He didn't let me inspect it," answered Tad haughtily. "Kidd Gauntlet is one o' those men who know what their business is better'n anybody else."

"How long after my friend's meeting with Jack Pennell did Kidd come along?" asked Dodger Dick.

"About ten minutes. The men had hardly got away before he came up."

"So soon? He must have been in the neighborhood at the time."

"I don't know about that."

"Well, Tad, what did he do with his find?"

"Put it in his pocket."

"And walked off?"

"And walked off."

"I guess that's all," remarked the young Dock Ferret, turning to his friend Tracy. "You see the missing article has been picked up."

"That is plain, if this boy has not deceived us."

"I'll stand good for him. He has told us the truth, Mr. Collins."

"And the truth is bad news—quite bad enough," and the youth drew a silver dollar from his pocket and extended it toward Frowsy Tad who stood on no ceremony, but instantly covered it with his hand.

"Now, who is Kidd Gauntlet?" asked the dude when he and Dick were some distance from the spot, while Tad had already disappeared. "The name is strange and new to me. I think you know it well."

"Indeed I do," smiled the wharf detective. "Captain Kidd, as we sometimes call him, is a man of many names and many tricks."

"A crook, eh?"

"He has never yet come before the courts. I know him well."

"And know where he lives?"

"Yes."

"Then the hand is not lost!" exclaimed Tracy. "It is not Kidd Gauntlet's property, and he has no right to keep it. You see we have gained something by coming here. Now we will go to Mr. Gauntlet and get the lost article, after which—"

Tracy paused without being interrupted.

The smile on Dick's face was enough to break his sentence.

"Why don't you finish, Tracy?" asked the boy.

"Well, I was going to say that after we have received the severed hand from Kidd Gauntlet, you can begin your hunt for its owner."

Dodger Dick broke into a laugh.

"I see you don't know much about some people," he ejaculated.

"What! will we have trouble with Gauntlet?" cried Collins. "The find does not belong to him—"

"Is it your property? Didn't you find it just as Captain Kidd has done?"

"Yes, yes, but—"

"I guess it is everybody's property, and yet belongs to no one," laughed Dodger Dick.

"I want it! Kidd Gauntlet likes money, doesn't he?"

"He does."

"Well, I have enough to pay a fair price for the hand. Now let us hunt the fellow up."

"With a brass band? That's not good policy just now, Mr. Collins."

Tracy bit his lip.

"Have it your way," he said to the wharf sleuth. "You know more about such things than I do, and I knock under cheerfully. I've never been interested in anything of this kind before. I am going to trust all to you. What are you going to do?"

"I intend to find who lost a hand!" cried Dodger Dick promptly.

"That's it?"

"And, if possible, I shall recover the hand itself."

"That's better still."

"Now, Mr. Collins, go back to your boarding-house and wait for my report."

"When will that come?"

"I don't know."

"I'll wait for it if it's a year in reaching me! Make no mistake. There may be a mint of money behind that severed hand. I'm off now, for I don't like this part of the city after dark. Good-night, Mr. Dick."

And Tracy Collins touched the brim of his straw hat, and put off as if he wanted to give emphasis to his last words.

"A queer fellow, and as singular as the mystery he brought me," mentally exclaimed Dick while he watched Tracy's flitting figure. "He wasn't cut out for what he is, and I can't see how he drifted into dudism. Well, Tracy, I'll do you a favor for tumbling you into the grass on the Battery. If I can, I will solve the mystery of the severed hand."

A minute later the young wharf sleuth was hurrying away, and not long after he plunged into the house where he had found the dude.

"On a new hunt are you, my Dock Ferret?" hissed a man who saw the Dodger disappear beyond the door. "You don't want to fool with us this time. This has been one o' my fortunate nights. Frowsy Tad gave me away I know he did; but I've got the prize we lost in the Park, and I guess Kidd Gauntlet is able to take care of it after this. Found by a dude! Who'd have thought it?" and the man laughed aloud as he turned away.

CHAPTER III. INTO BAD HANDS.

EUSTACE TRACY COLLINS had quarters in a certain street which runs into the Bowery.

They consisted of two rather small rooms in one of which he slept, while the other he used as a sort of parlor.

The young fellow was pretty well known as a street dude, although he had an intellect far above the average people of that rouseating class, and Dodger Dick was not the only one who had wondered why Macy played such a part.

He took his meals at one of the best and quietest of Bowery restaurants, seemed to have a fair supply of money, and, on the whole, enjoyed life very well.

The singular find in the lake in Central Park had struck Tracy as being very uncommon and mysterious, and as he happened to know that Dodger Dick sometimes followed strange trails to their end, he concluded to intrust him with the puzzle of the severed hand.

The day after the events related in our second chapter, Tracy found at his lodgings a letter for himself.

It was in the afternoon, and the message had come through the medium of the city post.

Wondering who could address him, the New York dude broke the seal and read the following, which was traced in a femininish hand on cream-colored paper:

"MR. E. TRACY COLLINS:—Will you on receipt of this letter please repair to No. 331 B— street, where you will learn of something to your advantage? Do not fail to fetch this with you, so as to establish your identity beyond question. This is important, and if you value success in life, you will not fail to comply with this request. Promptness means success. Respectfully,

"BRADDOCK BOWMAN."

The singular name at the bottom of the letter struck young Collins more than the text had done. Who was Braddock Bowman? Of course he did not know everybody in New York, and his correspondent was quite likely to inhabit some part of it.

He read the letter over twice before he resolved to obey.

B— street was in a quiet and, for all he knew, respectable quarter of New York, and if the writer knew anything to his advantage, it was right that he should know it, too.

It was nearly six o'clock before Tracy was ready to set out for B— street. In order to attract as little attention as possible, he put on a suit not the least dudish in appearance, and it appeared one of the most effective disguises he could have assumed.

When he reached the house, which was a three-story brick affair, with dark sand-stone steps, and outside shutters, he for the first time shrunk from an encounter with Braddock Bowman.

Something about the house, he could not tell what, impressed the dude unfavorably. In short, he did not like it.

"Fudge!" he cried to his fears. "Nothing is gained if nothing is risked. My resolves brought me hither and I do not propose to get weakened at this stage of the proceedings."

He marched up the steps and rung the bell.

The next moment the door opened, and Tracy caught sight of a female figure in the hall.

"Is Mr. Bowman in?" asked the dude.

A sudden light gleamed in the woman's eyes.

"He is in," was the reply, and the door was held open for Tracy.

He was conducted to the second floor where the woman pointed to a certain door with a slight smile.

"Mr. Bowman awaits you in there," she said and disappeared before the young man could reply.

The dude stepped forward and laid his hand on the knob.

"Come in," spoke a voice as he turned it, and a moment later Tracy Collins stood in the presence of a man he had never met before.

"You did not throw my letter aside!" exclaimed the stranger, a vivid light visible in the depths of his small eyes which were quite black and deep-set.

"No, I am here in reply to it. You are Braddock Bowman?"

"I am that gentleman."

Already the youth had looked the man over from head to foot, and had concluded that he did not like him.

Braddock Bowman was tall and slim. His skin was unusually dark, and drawn tightly over the bones in some places, and Tracy thought his long hands suggestive of eagle talons, and great strength of clutch.

What could this man want of him?

"Sit down, Mr. Collins," said Bowman, eying the young dude. "We will proceed to business without ceremony. That has always been my style and I am sure it will be agreeable to you. Now, sir, permit me to ask you a few questions."

The speaker followed his last sentence with a slight pause. It gave Tracy time to collect his thoughts, and to say that he was ready for the proposed catechism.

"Where is your father, Mr. Collins?" asked the man.

Tracy started.

"He is dead," he answered in a moment.

"And your mother?"

"Dead also."

"Ah yes; just so," observed Braddock Bowman with a faint smile. "Who is your nearest relative?"

"If I have a near living relative I do not know it," replied Tracy. "You see, I am quite alone in the world."

"But not moneyless, eh?"

"Oh no. I have enough for my own needs."

"But none to speculate with, ha, ha!"

Tracy flushed.

"I have speculated a little," he said. "A friend's tip turned out to my advantage some time ago, but I didn't excite the market very much."

The man did not smile at Tracy's quiet humor, but leaned forward until his hand if thrown out could have touched his visitor.

"You walk in the Park sometimes, I believe?" he said.

The dude could not suppress his surprise.

"I walk nearly everywhere about the city," was his answer.

"But the Park—the Park I'm talking about," persisted Braddock Bowman.

"Well, I go there, too."

"I thought so. You were there night before last?"

"Yes."

"You picked up something which had apparently been cast to the fish?"

There was no answer.

Was the man trying to impress upon Tracy that he knew all about the finding of the severed hand, or was he in search of information?

"Why don't you answer me, Mr. Collins?" he suddenly went on. "What did you find in the Park?"

"Do you know that I found anything?"

"Come, come! enough of this," exclaimed the man. "You found a certain article which you had no right to pick up. It was not your property. After you had it in your possession you thought of publishing your find to the world by showing it to a dock rat who enjoys a certain undeserved reputation among his fellow vermin. In other words, and to throw aside the mask, Mr. Tracy Collins, you took the hand to Dodger Dick, the Dock Spy."

The mask was off before the speaker declared it so, for Tracy had seen that the man was one of the chief makers of the Park mystery.

"If you know that I did all this, why put me through this ordeal?" retorted the youth.

"I want to see if you would lie about it," and the black eyes snapped furiously as they regarded the dude with all their intensity of a villain's power of look.

"Now, where is the hand?" suddenly questioned the man.

"I guess you know that, too."

Tracy uttered the words with a boldness that almost drove Braddock Bowman from his chair.

"You think I do, do you?" he cried, his hands nervously clutching the sides of the chair while his voice quavered. "You don't want to get obstreperous in this house. Have you lost the hand?"

"I have."

"Just as I thought. You can't keep anything very long," and the man's features relaxed, while he laughed. "I wouldn't like to intrust anything precious to you, Mr. Collins. Well, you have set the Dock Ferret onto the mystery. You are determined to interfere in a little business not your own. Are you so minded yet?"

Tracy did not know what to say.

He was in a strange house with a strange man, and that man, beyond doubt, a person connected with the mystery that enveloped the missing hand.

"Oh, well, I see you want to balk us," Braddock Bowman suddenly went on and then throwing a look toward the door he called "Jeffers!" and leaned back in his chair.

The word was hardly out of his mouth ere the door opened, and Tracy Collins turned to see a well-dressed Hercules spring into the room.

The mere appearance of the man sent a thrill through the dude's frame.

"Just as I expected, Jeffers," continued Bowman, covering Tracy with his fingers. "You will proceed to carry out the programme. That is the wasp who proposes to worry us. Do your duty, my man."

Jeffers took a step toward Tracy, and the youth bounded to his feet.

"Keep off!" he exclaimed throwing up his hands. "You have no right to touch me—"

"No right? Listen at him, Jeffers," laughed the gentleman villain.

Tracy, retreating from the clutch of the rascal in broadcloth, reached the door. He caught the knob, but it would not turn.

"Ha, ha, chippie!" cried Jeffers with a grin, as the next second his right hand gripped Tracy's coat collar.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THE TRAP HELD.

"I HAVE fallen among wolves. The letter was a decoy. These are the people who know all about the missing hand!"

Tracy Collins thought thus and very rapidly, too, when he found himself in the grip of Jeffers while Braddock Bowman looked on with a well-pleased smile on his dark face.

"I knew the letter would catch him, Jeffers," suddenly laughed the man in the chair, and then he caught the youth's eye.

"Yes, it caught me, as you say, and I was a fool for giving it a second thought," responded Tracy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" was the answer. "Chaff catches birds sometimes as well as grain does. Hold him well, Jeffers. We don't want the bird to get to the bush again."

"What are you going to do with me?" demanded the dude.

"Let you go of course!" laughed Jeffers in derision.

"You dare not harm me."

"Hear him! By my life, this is too good. Of course we are powerless, my meddler. The

next time you stroll in the Park you won't let everything attract you. Now, Jeffers, remove the fly that flew eagerly into the web," And Bowman settled back in his chair with the air of a business man who had concluded an interview.

The hand on Tracy's shoulder tightened, and Jeffers was about to open the door when the boy turned upon Bowman in spite of his captor's grip.

"You'll rue this work, Braddock Bowman!" he exclaimed. "A crime of some kind has been committed and you are at the head of it. Beware what you do with me! My coming to this house may not be unknown to others, and a copy of the decoy letter may exist. Beware, I say!"

Instantly the black eyes of the listener flashed.

"Fudge! It's all gammon!" he said. "Don't I know that you have just made your last play? I'm an old hand, Mr. Collins. By Jove! an old hand, ha, ha! Away with him, Jeffers!"

These were the last words Tracy heard from Braddock Bowman's lips, for he was hustled roughly from the room and the door separated them.

In the hands of the rascal in broadcloth resistance would be of no avail as the entrapped boy could easily see. He was still held with a firm clutch, and when he had been removed from the room he was marched down the hall toward the rear of the house.

"I guess you were lying to my friend when you intimated that your coming here was known to other parties," Jeffers said, when he had ushered his prisoner into a small room at the end of the corridor.

"Go ahead and see," was the response.

"You don't want to be too smart."

"Neither do you want to carry your game too far."

A laugh rippled over the man's lips.

"We'll go on and take the risks," he continued. "Now I have released you," and Tracy felt the hand relax and he was free. "You will find some clothes in your corner. Put them on."

Jeffers spoke in a voice of command, but the youth did not move.

"We can't wait on you all night. A new suit awaits you yonder. I think you will find the right sizes all around. Shall I assist you?"

The man took a step toward Tracy and seemed about to clutch him again.

"You had better let us have our way. It will be the best thing for you," he went on, speaking calmly. "Have the goodness to don the clothes we have prepared for you."

Without replying the youth went to the corner designated and found an entire outfit, even to cravat. The garments were new and good, though shop goods, and the color was a pleasing gray like a suit in which he often appeared.

"Off with the old and on with the new!" ordered Jeffers. "Don't ask any questions, but go to work!"

It was with an effort that Tracy kept back an absolute refusal to obey the command, and nothing but the threatened consequences sealed his lips.

Jeffers dropped into a chair at a small table and pretended not to watch the youth, but all the same he saw every movement through his long lashes.

Tracy Collins began to divest himself of his own clothes, and a few minutes later he stood arrayed in the new suit. The fit was almost perfect, and Jeffers chuckled over it when he saw the finishing touches put to the toilet.

"You will excuse me, but we have to be careful," he smiled as he picked up the discarded garments and began to go through the pockets with the dexterity of a custom-house searcher.

Tracy looked on in silence.

"Aha! you have transferred a few things to the fresh suit," the man exclaimed, looking up into the boy's face. "Here, turn your pockets out. You will be supplied with all the necessities of life, and some of the luxuries into the bargain."

"You've got no mercy," answered Tracy, surrendering a few personal articles which he had carried over to the new suit.

"We can't afford to have very much just now."

Jeffers went to a sideboard in one of the walls and opened a small wooden door.

"I believe lemonade is your favorite summer drink," he observed, glancing over his shoulder at Tracy. "You need a little something after your exertion. Here we are, my boy," and the man came back with pitcher and glass.

Tracy seemed to draw back.

"It's not poison, you see," continued Jeffers, pouring some of the lemonade into the glass

and drinking it down with considerable display. "Now, try a tumbler. It will strengthen you, and do you good."

The young dude took the glass which Jeffers extended and almost emptied it before he stopped.

"He'll go in a minute," said the man, carrying the remainder of the drink back to the wall cupboard.

All at once the one light in the room grew into a thousand before Tracy's eyes. Strange pains darted through his head, his lower limbs grew weak, there were twenty men at the sideboard instead of one.

He had swallowed a potent drug!

This was the last thought that filled his mind before he tottered forward. He tried to articulate a cry, but could send forth no sound. The room grew suddenly dark.

Jeffers turned from the wall in time to catch Tracy as he pitched headlong toward the door. There was a gleam of triumph in the villain's eyes.

"I guess there is virtue in lemonade," he exclaimed, while he held Tracy from the floor and gazed down into the face almost without color.

"He came swift to the net, and it was not much of a job to do, either. The rest is easy."

A short time later the polished features of Jeffers appeared at Braddock Bowman's door.

"It is all right," he grinned, as the sallow man encountered his look.

"Did you have much trouble?"

"Not any."

"Good! You will finish the business before you rest?"

"Right away."

Then the door shut, Jeffers disappeared, and Bowman turned to the desk, where the sleek sport had found him.

It was some time after his adventures in the strange house at B—street when Tracy Collins came back to consciousness.

He felt miserable, and for a while he could not believe that he was not the victim of some hideous dream.

He was lying on a narrow bed in a dark room, and there seemed to be a singular rocking motion to the house.

At first Tracy thought his brain was in a swirl, but he gradually fixed his mind, and concluded that his bed rocked gently but quite perceptibly.

"Where am I?" broke over his lips as he sprang out and brought up suddenly against a wall. "I recollect the trap that caught me, the change of clothes, the fatal draught— Merciful heavens! what new snare am I in now?"

His hands found a latch as he sounded the last word, and jerking a door open, he rushed out into a narrow corridor, where he found that he could hardly keep his feet.

Not far ahead he caught a gleam of light, and going forward he found a ladder. A nameless shudder took possession of him for a second. He dashed up the ladder and landed on a firm floor of heavy planks.

The day was around him, and the first breeze of morning touched his fevered forehead.

One look was enough for Tracy Collins.

Above him were the tall masts of a vessel that was plowing the water like a leviathan, and all around was the shoreless sea!

Tracy gave one wild cry and then stood speechless on the deck.

It was not a dream. He was on the ocean in a strange ship, and still in the clutches of the conspirators.

"Hello, there! Up, eh?" suddenly rung out a voice, at sound of which the youth turned and saw a man approaching. "You've had a good sleep, I'm thinkin', and I hope you feel refreshed. A fine day this, Mr. Hardy."

"Hardy?" echoed Tracy. "I am Tracy Collins, of New York. Where am I?"

"Ah, don't you know?" the man smiled. "This is the Ocean Oriole."

"Where bound?"

"Australia."

"I see! They are bound to get rid of me!" the youth cried. "You are in the plot if you are the captain!"

There was no reply.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THE DODGER LOST A TRAIL.

LET us go back to Dodger Dick.

The young Dock Ferret had no means of knowing anything about the strange adventures which had befallen his new acquaintance, Tracy Collins.

As he did not expect to report to the youth until he had recovered or solved the mystery of

the missing hand, he might not discover his absence for some time.

Dick was not a laggard in anything he undertook, and having made the discovery that the hand had fallen into Kidd Gauntlet's possession, he went to work immediately.

It will be remembered that Captain Kidd had seen Dick enter the house where he lodged when he was not in "active service" along the river. The young spotter was not aware of this, and if he had been, the fact would not have given him much concern.

"You are very sleek, Kidd Gauntlet," murmured the boy. "And some of your games have been played among the vermin of the docks which makes me acquainted with your methods. You never wait for something to turn up, but you go ahead and work up a fortune. If you were so close on Tracy Collins's heels when he lost the hand you must have suspected him. But we will find you out, Kidd."

It was not until the next day after Tracy's fall into the fatal trap, sprung by the decoy letter, that Dodger Dick again caught sight of the city sport. Then he saw him and another man entering a fashionable Broadway restaurant.

Kidd Gauntlet was always well dressed, but now he shone resplendent in a new suit, and his companion, who was a man of his own age, was also arrayed in elegant toggerly which had not been from the tailor's a great while.

"A brace of sharps in every sense of the word!" said Dick to himself when he saw the two men seat themselves at one of the tables not far from the entrance. "When you see them together you can bet that something is in the wind. What does it cost for a meal in there? Let me see. I guess I can stand the racket."

Dick at the time looked very unlike the keen-eyed boy who had worked the docks at all hours in the interest of justice, and he was not likely to be refused a meal at one of the tables if he had the money to pay for what he ordered.

Before he went inside he saw that Kidd Gauntlet had his back toward the door, and that the second sharp was paying no attention whatever to those who came in at the entrance.

A minute afterward the wharf ferret had slipped into the place, and was at the table nearest the pair with his back to Captain Kidd, and his ears on the alert.

"Now, drive ahead with your dray," mentally exclaimed the boy when he had ordered a few eatables which would enable him to keep up appearances while he listened. "Even if you discover me, Kidd Gauntlet, you won't attempt to exercise any authority. You can't afford to, my dear fellow. I should say not, ha, ha!"

It was not long before Dodger Dick discovered that the two sharps were talking across their table in confidential tones, but by and by Captain Kidd's companion raised his voice, and a few words struck the young spy's ears.

"I'm glad you got through with your job so easily, Jeffers," remarked Gauntlet at the conclusion of a narrative, but very little of which Dick caught. "By this time he is enjoying a life on the ocean wave, eh?"

"I hope so, Kidd."

"Did the old man play his part of the game well?"

"Almost to perfection. He lost his temper once or twice when the youngster got saucy, but a look from me cooled him down."

"He is our gold mine, and you don't want to lose sight of the fact."

"I will not."

"Number 331 B— street is just the house for the business, isn't it?"

"It is admirably adapted to the game."

"I said so when we took it," exclaimed Kidd, well pleased. "You can get in and out so nicely. The kid did not go out by the front door, did he?"

"No."

"What did Captain Jeff say?"

"Oh, he jumped at the job."

"He won't release the passenger this side of Melbourne?"

"Of course not."

"Excellent! I am delighted, Jeffers. Now let me whisper to you that our patient needs a little looking after."

"Why so?"

"She half repents of the deed."

Jeffers let slip an oath over his half-raised fork.

"She must not do that," he cried. "Don't you know, Kidd, that the prize at the bottom of the dish is too big to relinquish now?"

"Who talks of relinquishing it?"

"You say she wavers."

"So Stella says, but she is shrewd enough to keep sealed lips when I am about. Stella is getting impatient. She wants to run to riches before she can walk. Jeffers, I tell you what must be done."

"Well?"

Kidd Gauntlet leaned across the table.

"You must press your suit at once."

"By Jupiter, I don't fancy Stella very much, but if marriage will insure success, marriage it shall be!"

"It will bind her to us," continued Kidd. "In this game we want no failure, Jeffers. The hand is safe at last."

"In no pond to be picked up by a city dude?" laughed Kidd's companion.

"No."

"That is excellent."

"And what is more, I have my hand where I can close on the Dock Ferret at any time."

"We can't fail, Kidd. It is impossible."

If Dodger Dick could have seen Kidd Gauntlet's expression at that moment, he would have noticed two eyes full of triumph.

"I am going to the old gentleman," resumed Kidd. "I wish you would visit Stella and see how Nara gets along."

"I'll go at once."

The two men then ordered a finishing bottle of wine, and while they were enjoying its contents, Dodger Dick slipped from his table and glided to the sidewalk.

"A pair of good ears are worth more than Vanderbilt's millions!" he laughed to himself. "I got a bushel of information, but it is all mixed up. The 'old man' evidently inhabits No. 331 B— street, and is concerned in the drama of the lost hand. The person who once owned the member is with a woman called Stella, undoubtedly the companion of the man who threw the hand into the Park lake when Tracy Collins was on deck. Now, who has been taken to Australia by Captain Jeff? I know the captain. He owns a vessel called the Ocean Oriole, and runs her himself. He doesn't bear the best of names at the shipping-office, as I happened to find out while I was looking up a little smuggling matter of the police. You must have sailed since yesterday, Captain Jeff, for I saw the Oriole in port then. Now, here come my city sharks. You are going to see the 'old man,' Captain Kidd, so I won't shadow you. Jeffers is the fellow I'm after just now."

The two men walked to the first crossing together, where they stopped, exchanged a few words and separated.

Kidd Gauntlet came back toward Dodger Dick, but the young ferret eluded his roving eye, and when he had disappeared, hurried after his quarry.

Jeffers was a fast walker and knew how to get over a thronged sidewalk with ease. Dick had hard work keeping him in sight.

"Too eager by half!" suddenly exclaimed the boy as Jeffers, eager to pass a man, ran against a very large woman, and lost his hat, which rolled into the gutter. "That irritates him, as I can see, and he is doing some lively thinking. Move along, Jeffers. You've lost a minute already. This will never do."

The collision and the momentary loss of the hat had been received with some merriment by a dozen spectators, and several street Arabs had greeted them with shouts of delight.

"He did that on purpose, chippie!" cried one to the woman, who was regarding Jeffers with increasing indignation.

"That's his game, madam!" put in another. "Why don't you turn him over to the cops? There's one on the corner yonder, an' it's Mickey Dooley, who likes to take such daisies in."

Jeffers sent looks of fire toward the gutter-snipes, who took good care to keep beyond range.

"I humbly apologize, madam," he began in hasty tones to the woman.

"Ho! ho! the old game!" sung out one of the gamins, and all three laughed in concert.

"You'll apologize in the courts," was the angry retort, and then the insulted Amazon raised her voice, while one of the street Arabs shouted, "This way, Mickey!"

An instant later the burly Hibernian, who wore the uniform of an M. P., strutted forward, and smiled benignly on the woman, when he saw that she was a representative of the blessed isle across the sea.

"That man!—ran into me, sir!—on purpose for a purpose! A dozen good people saw the act," excitedly cried the woman.

"I shall have to," the officer said to Jeffers, in a polite voice.

"I would give my fortune if he'd let Jeffers

alone," exclaimed Dodger Dick. "But, Mickey Dooley is in his glory when he ropes some one in."

Already the policeman had taken Jeffers, much to the delight of the trio of gamins, who liked no better fun than to see a well-dressed fellow come to grief in public.

"It holds me back from a discovery," resumed Dick. "I shall have to keep the cop and his prisoner in sight, for, if I have judged Jeffers rightly, he will not see the inside of a station to-day."

A number of people were now between the wharf detective and his game.

All at once he was jostled almost to the curb by a man in a hurry. When he recovered he started forward again, but soon uttered a sharp cry and stopped.

Policeman Dooley was walking back toward him empty-handed.

Jeffers had already given him the slip!

CHAPTER V.

HOW A TRAIL WAS FOUND.

FOR a moment the Dodger could scarcely believe his eyes, but there was the policeman, as large as life, without his late prisoner.

At last the boy's indignation began to rise.

He knew Mr. Dooley for a man whose palm could be sometimes crossed to advantage with the legal tender of the country, and he shrewdly guessed the cause of Jeffers's disappearance.

"I thought you had a prisoner a while ago, Mr. Dooley?" exclaimed Dick, as the patrolman reached his favorite station in the shade on the corner.

"Not I, boy," was the answer. "I don't take 'em in these afternoons. Bad luck to the chippies who give me trouble when the sun is scorching the sidewalks, I dunno."

"That settles it," muttered Dick, moving off. "Jeffers knew his captor on sight, and he cut his bonds with a silver knife. It's been done before, and you are not one of the incorruptibles, Mickey Dooley—not by any means!"

It would be safe to say that Policeman Dooley was the richer by a small amount for his meeting with the city sharp, and Dick left him in possession of his new wealth, and vanished from the scene.

Jeffers was gone, the Dock Ferret knew not whither.

He might have dodged down the first street, or kept on to the Bowery, which was quite near and ready to swallow him up in its motley crowds.

Despairing of striking the fellow's trail and deploring the trivial incident which had caused him to lose it, Dodger Dick turned aside and soon arrived at Tracy Collins's lodgings.

His last meeting with the young man led him to believe that he would find him at home, but what was his surprise when he learned that the finder of the severed hand was not there!

A young girl attached to the house as maid-of-all-work volunteered the information that Tracy went away on the afternoon of the preceding day, and, up to the hour of Dick's call, had not returned.

Here was a piece of news that set the young spotter to thinking.

"You are sure he did not come back and occupy his bed last night?" questioned Dick.

"I am. It was not tumbled when I went to make it this morning."

"Is he in the habit of doing this?"

"He never did so before. You don't think anything has happened to Tracy, do you?"

The girl's voice betrayed a good deal of anxiety.

"I don't know. He is a friend of yours, is he not?"

"I call him so," replied the girl blushing.

"He got me a music teacher when he heard me say that I'd like to learn it."

"What is your name?"

"Roxy."

"Never mind; Tracy will turn up all right," the Dodger assured, cheerily, at which the girl's eyes beamed with delight. "Would you let me go up to his room? Maybe he left some word for me."

A little while later the young detective stood in Tracy Collins's private lodgings, and Roxy had left him to himself.

He had hoped to discover some clew to the youth's prolonged absence, an explanatory letter or something of the sort; but he found nothing of the kind.

"I'm going to follow up this trail before I go back to the other," Dick said to himself when he reached the street. "I think I know where I can get a little news about Captain Jeff's departure for Australia. He left before his time;

I am almost certain of it. What took the fellow off?—the passenger talked about by Captain Kidd and Jeffers at the restaurant?"

The dock spy was soon far from Tracy's boarding-house, and twenty minutes later he was where he ever felt at home—among the piers of New York.

"Gone! sure enough!" burst from his lips when he stopped and gazed at a vessel that lay before him with not a breath of wind among her dreary sails. "That ship is not the Ocean Oriole, but she lies where Captain Jeff's vessel lay yesterday. Hey, there, Pincher! Waitz this way a moment, will you?"

At Dick's call a boy of sixteen rolled from a pile of baled goods and came forward.

"Taking a rum bath were you, Pincher?" resumed the Dodger.

"Kinder so," grinned the wharf rustler. "I've been watching that ship yonder. She's not used to our piers, and the fellows who live in her keep looking at the city like a passel o' tenderfeet from Jersey."

"When did she come?"

"About noon. She slipped in after Captain Jeff had slipped out."

"So the Oriole skipped?"

"In the night like a bank cashier."

"Rather sudden, wasn't it, Pincher?"

"Oh, he's a queer one, you know," laughed the wharf rat. "I bunked on the bales yonder last night, but the Oriole weighed anchor before I turned in."

"Did he take any passengers?"

"One, I think."

"A young man?"

"Yes; how did you guess it, Dick?"

"Never mind."

"Well, late in the afternoon a cab drove on to the pier, and two persons got out. One was a well-built man, something on the masher order; the other was a young chap barely twenty. The boy looked and acted sick. He couldn't walk without assistance, and once I thought he was going to pitch off the plank. Captain Jeff must have been expecting the couple, for I saw him meet 'em on his vessel, and then all disappeared."

"What became of the cab?"

"It waited till the man came back. He got into it and was driven away."

"The boy remained on the Oriole?"

"Yes."

"Did you notice the young fellow's clothes?"

"That's a funny question, Dodger, but I guess I can answer it," replied Pincher, with a light laugh. "Yes, I noticed them, because the suit was new, and had store-marks about it. I'll bet my head that the young man wore it yesterday for the first time."

Dick was silent for a moment.

"Pincher," he said, leaning slightly forward, "do you know Eustace Tracy Collins, the dude?"

Pincher shook his head.

"That boy was no dude!" he quickly exclaimed. "I know the What-is-it on sight, Dick. If I do camp on the piers, I know a dude when I see it. No siree! the boy who went on board the Oriole was none o' that kind."

The Dodger for a second thought he had struck a poor trail.

The boy passenger of the Australian bound bark was not Tracy Collins, after all.

"The man you did not know, Pincher?" he asked, pushing his inquiries one notch further.

"I think I've seen him before."

"Was he like this?" and the wharf-spy detective gave a hasty description of Jeffers as he had seen him with Kidd Gauntlet a short time previous.

"That's the man!" exclaimed Pincher. "You hit him all around, but the boy you don't locate worth a copper. I guess his baggage had been sent aboard some time before, for the two didn't take anything from the cab."

The Dodger was content to let Pincher believe in the correctness of this observation.

"I believe that the Oriole's passenger is Tracy Collins," murmured Dick. "The man who fetched him to the ship was Jeffers, who is clearly connected with Kidd Gauntlet in the mystery of the lost hand. The boy was dressed in other clothes and drugged. That is why he acted so strangely in the man's hands. You always go straight to Melbourne, Captain Jeff, and although the Ocean Oriole is a fast sailer, a cablegram under the water will beat her every time."

"I guess you're puzzled, eh, Dodger?" exclaimed the young detective's acquaintance, grinning at his thoughtful expression.

"Not much just now," and Dick brightened up. "Your eyes served me well last night,

Pincher. A thousand thanks till you're better paid."

"I'm paid already," answered the dock rat. "I— Look yonder! There is the man who came down with the boy!"

Dodger Dick whirled and caught the direction of Pincher's glance.

"I see him!" he exclaimed. "This is unexpected luck. I lost the fellow awhile ago, but he'll not give me the slip another time."

And Dick said "Good-day, Pincher," and was off.

CHAPTER VI. THE VICTIM.

"I WOULD like to know what is up now," wondered Pincher as Dick disappeared after the man who had been sighted. "I never see the Dodger any more only when he is after something. He keeps a trail like a bloodhound when he has once found it. Wanted to know all about the young man who went on board o' Captain Jeff's ship, didn't he? I wish I had watched a little closer. There might have been something in the affair for Pincher."

The wharf rat was inclined to feel disgusted over his luck, but he saw that it was too late to profit by what he had seen the day before, and went back to his perch on the bales.

Meantime Jeffers was leading Dodger Dick a good chase from the pier.

He did not seem aware that he was followed, although his gait was quite rapid, and when he turned into a certain street, he stopped and looked around.

"Is it possible that he is near the game already?" muttered Dick. "I recollect that Jeffers promised to see Kidd Gauntlet and the other person. I trust he is going to show me where they live. A thousand thanks, Jeffers, if you do."

All at once the man who had been so persistently followed entered a three-story brick house which had a quiet look.

Dick saw the door shut behind him, and fancied that he heard the click of a lock.

As he could not see beyond the threshold, he did not notice Jeffers mount a stair and halt at a door not far from the first landing.

There was a strange expression on the man's face—a mixture of doubt and fear.

In response to his raps the door opened from within, and the face of a woman appeared.

The city sharp entered the room, and his roving eye caught sight of another occupant, who filled a rocking-chair near the window that looked through a lot of potted plants into the street below.

This person, who was a young girl, beautiful, but very pale, started when she saw Jeffers, and her lips met suddenly, a sign of aversion.

"How are you, Nora?" asked the sport, coming forward as he addressed the girl in the chair.

"You can see," was the answer, and the speaker put forward an arm bandaged at the end, where it appeared to lack a hand. "You had to do it. You had to cripple me for life for what? Ay, for what?"

The fair eyes suddenly grew brilliant, and as they became fixed on Jeffers they got an indignant flash.

The woman who had let the sport in walked to the young girl and bent over her.

"You don't want to excite yourself," she said. "You did not rest well last night—"

"Rest! who can rest who has been robbed of a hand?" was the response. "You have never suffered thus, Stella. What would you say if they had made you the victim?"

"My years were against it. You are the person who is fitted for the part of heiress."

"Hush! Don't go back to the scheme. Let me forget that I have been maimed for money. I wish I could sleep forever, and thus cease to recollect the infamy which has cost me a hand."

"I heard you were disposed to repent," said Jeffers.

"Who told you?"

Nora's eyes were upon him again.

"Of course Kidd gave you the information," she went on before he could frame a reply.

"May the vengeance of Right fall on his head for his work! Go back to him and say that I demand release? I refuse to go another step in this horrible scheme. It is infamous. Give me back my hand. What have you done with it, Muriel Jeffers? I call down upon you the curse of Heaven. It is all for gold. I am to be the maimed heiress of one of the biggest fortunes in New York. That is what you say. Where is the man you have talked about so much? Why doesn't he face me? Ah! he dare not! He keeps his distance. He knows that he can-

not look into the face of the person his greed has deformed for life. All his plans shall fail!"

Jeffers looked for a second at Stella and then turned to the young creature from whose lips the thrilling sentences had burst.

The exertion had completely unnerved her, for she had sunk back into the chair and her face was whiter than before. Her breathing was a series of short gasps.

Stella tenderly ran her hand over the upturned brow, and Jeffers, who caught the movement, saw that deep sympathy had moved her.

Suddenly the girl fainted, and when the sport sprang toward the chair, he felt the hand of Stella at his breast.

"I can attend to her," cried Stella, catching his eye. "Why couldn't you have spared the poor child this?"

At that moment the gaze of the two met.

"That is right! Throw the blame all on me," exclaimed Jeffers. "She was ready to enter the scheme when it was first broached. You know very well, Stella, that she did not object."

"No, but then she did not know what had to follow. She was not told that she had to sacrifice one of her hands."

The man glanced at her bandaged wrist.

"How does the wound heal?" he asked.

"It is getting along nicely."

"She frets too much."

"Do you blame her?" was the answer.

Jeffers smiled.

"I thought you told me she had the proper amount of courage, Stella."

"I thought so."

"But she faints at the beginning of the game. This will never do."

"Where is Braddock Bowman?" suddenly asked the woman.

"In the house on B— street."

"Arranging all the wires for the final play, eh?"

"Yes. He is the shrewdest man in New York."

"And the most cruel! Here is this young girl, his own brother's child, made the tool for raking his golden millions from the fire. Do you think the man we serve has any heart, Muriel Jeffers?"

"You are harsh to-day, Stella."

"I am just!" And the woman's eyes seemed to flash.

"You don't like Braddock Bowman."

"How can I, after what I have seen?" And the speaker looked down at the pallid face resting on her hand. "Do you expect he will give us our share of the spoils?"

"He will."

"You trust him further than I do. Braddock Bowman is one of those men who keep a promise no longer than it serves their purpose. Why doesn't he come to see the child he has maimed for life? Is he a coward as well as a schemer?"

"Give him a chance. He knows how to conduct an affair like this."

"He ought to. I wish Nora had her hand back. To restore it I would go to the gutters of New York for my bread."

Jeffers burst into a laugh which seemed to send a flood of hightening blood to Stella's temples.

"You don't intend to desert us?" he suddenly exclaimed, becoming serious.

"No. I have gone too far. I am going to the end," answered the woman, in strange tones.

"I had a weird dream last night. I was in a forest, with a lot of wild dogs on my track. By-and-by a man passed me, running like myself. I looked up. It was Kidd Gauntlet. A dog was after him. After a while I reached a thicket that seemed to afford shelter. While I panted there the bushes parted, and Braddock Bowman crept through. I wanted to speak to him, but a strange spell held my tongue. When he was gone a sleuth-hound came along on his trail. We were all hunted, Muriel. What a wild vision it was! and when the forest changed suddenly into a city, and the dogs into men, I awoke with a cry that startled Nora here, poor girl!"

"You dreamed all this?" said Jeffers, with a derisive smile.

"Yes, but the strange horror of the vision—think of that," was the answer. "I feared to go to sleep again. The dogs of the forest had become detectives in the city."

"Nonsense, Stella!" cried the New York sport. "We are not suspected. Braddock Bowman is the last man to be suspicioned of anything crooked. He knows that all we have to do to get the hoarded Tuscan riches is to make the old man believe that Nora is his child. And the missing hand will complete the proof."

"So he says."

"So he knows!" spoke Jeffers, firmly. "When the wound heals we rake in the fortune, for the moment Nora is recognized by Tully Tuscan, the childless millionaire, she becomes the richest heiress in this city. It was a foolish dream, Stella. By Jove! I believe you haven't recovered yet."

There was no reply, for there were signs that the young girl was coming back to consciousness, and Stella leaned over her.

"Let us alone now," she suddenly continued, looking up at Jeffers. "It will not be good for her to see you here when she comes out of the faint. Come some other time when she is better. And tell Kidd not to come to-day."

These words were as good as a dismissal, and with a look at Nora, the maimed, and a bow to Stella, the sport walked from the room.

"The Tuscan gold will heal her hurts!" laughed Jeffers, as he went down the steps of the quiet house. "Jupiter! that was a singular dream of Stella's! I never heard of one like it. Sleuth-hounds on our track? I don't believe it! Kidd is going to attend to the Dock Ferret, and the inquisitive dude is bound for Australia."

CHAPTER VII.

AN INSPIRATION.

WAS there ever a cooler or deeper plot for a golden fortune?

That a set of men should deliberately deprive a beautiful young girl of one of her hands to carry out their base designs on an old man's wealth is almost beyond belief, yet the league to which the reader has been introduced was capable of stooping to just such villainy.

Tully Tuscan was a retired banker on the verge of sixty, somewhat eccentric, and very rich.

It was pretty generally known that he once had a child who had met with an accident by which her left hand was lost.

Not long after this misfortune the daughter disappeared under mysterious circumstances. The wealth of the New York banker and his position in business circles gave to the disappearance more notoriety than it would have received under ordinary circumstances, and the hunt for Dora Tuscan was long and arduous.

The girl was the banker's only child, and consequently his sole legatee.

The search ended abruptly, so far as the searchers were concerned, several weeks after its beginning.

A body was found wedged in among the planks of a pier, and while the features were not recognizable, a missing left hand solved the mystery of Dora Tuscan's fate.

The father was not convinced. He clung to certain doubts, which he did not get rid of as the years went by. The terrible misfortune touched his mind, but did not unsettle it.

He left his business and retired to the seclusion of a princely home in the upper part of the city.

Here he was the victim of false detectives and charlatans of every description.

He caused photographs and lithographs of the lost child to be circulated all over the country, but the years brought her not.

Ten years passed away, and the solitary old man, wifeless and childless in the great house, hugged to his heart the belief that the missing one would some day be found.

He was won't to declare that he would recognize Dora on sight, despite the long time that had elapsed.

She had left him a child; she would return a young woman, and in time to cheer the remainder of his life!

To foist upon the old man's recognition a false heir for the deliberate purpose of robbing him of his money, was the design of the three spiders we have introduced.

The scheme originated in Braddock Bowman's brain, and it has been seen that he found two effective confederates in Kidd Gauntlet and Muriel Jeffers.

Braddock Bowman did the planning, the others executed. We cannot stop here to explain how the conspirators found Nora, the girl whom they had selected for the role of Dora Tuscan.

A singular fate threw her across their path just when they were looking for a person to their liking, and her striking facial resemblance to the photographs of the banker's child was enough to fasten their grip upon her.

Stella they found easier.

Kidd Gauntlet had chosen her for her part of the work.

Such was, in brief, the scheme of the city scoundrels.

They would stop at nothing.

Braddock Bowman, with the cunning of Satan, had crept into the good graces of the ex-banker, and had raised his hopes concerning the missing child.

Could rascality get a step further?

To fight the league and that when their schemes were being carried out in the dark, there was no one but the cool, keen, brave-hearted boy who had been raised among the wharves—Dodger Dick, the self-made detective.

As yet he knew nothing of the trio's villainy.

He had discovered that the three were connected in the same plot, that somebody had been deprived of a hand for a dark purpose, that a young man had been carried on board a vessel about to sail for Australia.

This is a good deal, the reader may say, but it would not be enough to beat the conspiracy.

Against whom were the rascals working? That was the point.

To go back, Dodger Dick was "on guard" when Jeffers emerged from the house where he had had the interview with Stella and the maimed girl.

He was almost certain that the sleek sharp had led him to an important point in the game, and when he saw the fellow move off he let him depart unmolested.

"I can afford to let you go for the present, Jeffers," murmured the boy. "You will probably go back to report to Captain Kidd, if he has finished his visit on B—street. I want to pick up a very important link in the chain if I can find it."

Dodger Dick turned away and went to a house where he was always welcome.

This was no other place than the one occupied by his best friend, Mother Sturgeon, the woman who had given him the little parental care he had known.

Dick crept up-stairs and into the room where a dark-complexioned woman sat at a little table sewing dreamily in Mother Sturgeon's way.

After an interchange of greetings, the young ferret threw himself upon an old lounge which rested against the wall, and struck at the puzzle that filled his brain.

For twenty minutes not a word was spoken. Mother Sturgeon sewed away with occasional glances toward the young wharf spy whom she did not venture to disturb.

She had seen Dick in a like mood before.

"It's a deep lay!" suddenly exclaimed the Dodger. "Deep as the sea!"

Mother Sturgeon looked up.

"What is deep, Dickey?" she asked. "Have the river cops given you another job that bothers 'em?"

"Hang the harbor blue-coats!" was the answer. "Look here, Mother Sturgeon. Maybe you can help me. Give your needle rest a little while, and lend me your noggin."

"I'm at your service, but you know I'm thick-headed when it comes to the puzzles you pick up on the docks."

The old woman was all attention and Dick seemed to be framing his questions.

"Suppose there was in New York a young woman who had but one hand—I'm only supposing a case, you see—and that a certain man was much interested in her—so much so that he would abduct a boy who had discovered something about her—"

"There, Dickey! you're giving me too big a slice off the loaf!" interrupted Mother Sturgeon. "A girl with one hand is it? Why, that calls to mind the banker and his missing daughter."

Dodger Dick could not suppress a violent start.

"What banker?" he cried, almost falling from the lounge.

"Oh, I guess you have forgotten it, 'most everybody has," was the reply. "Ten years ago or longer, a man named Tully Tuscan, a rich banker, lost his little girl who had but one hand. My! what an excitement it raised at the time. You were young then, Dickey! and don't recollect the circumstances. But they found the child after a hot hunt."

"Found her?"

"Yes; the body was wedged in among the docks somehow. It was weeks after the disappearance, and, as the little one had been in the water all that time, of course she was dead! The banker who had more money than he knew what to do with, got it into his head that it wasn't his child what was found, and he kept the police on the hunt. I guess he gave up long ago. Everybody else did. That's how I came to think about little Dora Tuscan. You talk about a girl with one hand. That was all she had, you see."

For several moments the boy looked at Mother Sturgeon without speaking.

His eyes sparkled brilliantly in the lamp-light.

"I was a boy then, but I remember the name you have mentioned," he remarked. "I wonder what has become of the banker?"

"He may be dead, for all I know," was the reply. "I used to have a picture of little Dora Tuscan; they threw 'em all over the city at the time. But I haven't seen it for years."

"Won't you try to find it, Mother Sturgeon? Just to please me, you know."

The woman immediately put aside her sewing and got up.

Then Dick was alone, for his foster-mother had gone to the closet where she kept the few treasures she possessed.

It was a long five minutes that intervened between Mother Sturgeon's departure and return.

"Ah! you have it!" cried the Dodger, when she returned to the room with triumph in her eyes and a crumpled lithograph in one of her hands.

"I didn't expect to find it, but here it is. This is Dora Tuscan as she looked when she went away."

The wharf-spy detective held out his hand for the picture, and was soon studying it with eyes that saw nothing else.

Suddenly he sprang from the lounge and seized his hat.

"What is it now?" asked Mother Sturgeon.

"I want to know more!" he exclaimed. "I am going to cut a bee-line to the nearest Directory. If Tully Tuscan is alive, and I trust he is, I propose to see him before I sleep."

And Dick vanished like an arrow.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DODGER'S WARNING.

"Two heads are better than one," thought the Dodger, as he left Mother Sturgeon alone and began his hunt for a city Directory, which was to tell him whether Tully Tuscan, the famous banker, was still a resident of New York.

His foster-parent had unexpectedly furnished him with a new link in the mysterious chain he was trying to pick up. He remembered having heard something about the banker and his missing child, but the recollection was too indistinct to be of service now.

Dick was not long finding the book he wanted, and a moment after the discovery, an eager boy was running over the T's with nimble finger.

All at once he stopped.

"Tully Tuscan, by the stars!" he exclaimed. "It must be the banker," and then Dick fixed in his mind the direction given opposite the name in the Directory.

There was no other "Tuscan" on the page. It stood alone as if to impress the young detective who resolved to make a call forthwith, and turning from the book he hurried off without going back to acquaint Mother Sturgeon with his intentions.

In due time, after a ride up-town on the Elevated cars, Dodger Dick presented himself at the door of a superb house which betokened wealth on the part of its owner.

It was late for a call, business or otherwise, but the wharf-spy detective did not care for this.

The door was opened by a man with a white beard.

"What is it, boy?" he asked, a look of mingled chagrin and surprise coming into his deep-set and melancholy eyes when he saw who his caller was.

"Are you Mr. Tuscan?"

"I am."

"Then you are the gentleman I want to see."

"On business?"

"On very important business."

The shadow of a smile appeared on the man's face.

"Is it about—" he hesitated.

"About Dora?" he finished with an effort.

"Yes, something about your child," answered Dick, gliding into the hall before he could be shut out as he feared he was going to be.

"I listen to everybody, therefore I won't refuse to hear you," replied the ex-banker. "God forbid that I should refuse to lend an ear when the name of my child is mentioned. Come into the library, boy."

He led the way into a luxuriously furnished room of ample dimensions where he motioned Dick to a chair and then seated himself.

"What is your story?" he asked.

"I have none," responded the young ferret. "I do not profess to have discovered your lost child, Mr. Tuscan. I have not come to you for the purpose of raising your hopes. I want you to tell me something about Dora."

"That is queer," and the sad face of the ex-banker grew bright for a moment under the influence of a smile. "People who come here want me to listen to them. You are an exception, boy. Who are you?"

"Richard Sly."

The name did not impress Tully Tuscan. He had probably never heard it before.

"So you want to hear about Dora?"

"If you please. When was she first missing? And what is the latest story about her that has come to your ears?"

"You shall hear."

The ex-banker settled back into his chair and began the story which he had told a thousand times within the past ten years. He had a very interested auditor, and one who did not lose a single syllable in the entire narrative.

"Of course I have been often victimized since the terrible blow fell," said Tuscan, at the close of his story. "Unprincipled persons have taken advantage of my trouble, and have hoodwinked me with some adroit stories. I have followed a hundred trails, pried into a score of plots to rob me, and I presume it will be thus until the end comes."

"Do you still expect to find her?"

"I have never given her up," was the prompt response. "I know they found in the water the body of a one-armed child, but for all this I hope on and on. I think the light is breaking at last. The cloud seems to have a silver lining."

"Do you really think so?" queried the boy with a slight start.

"I do. I have a friend who gives me renewed hope. He has been following a trail for a long time, the trail of a young girl who has but one hand. Ah! isn't that encouraging? I am certain she is my long-lost Dora. She must be! The missing hand proves it, you see."

A thrill swept over Dodger Dick's frame.

He thought of what his cunning had discovered.

"You want to be certain that the friend you speak of is not a fraud," remarked the Dodger, with boldness.

"He is nothing of the kind!" exclaimed the ex-banker. "I think I know Braddock Bowman well enough to believe him thoroughly honest. But for the life of me, boy, I cannot see why you should be interested in Tully Tuscan and his lost daughter."

"A good many things interest me nowadays," evasively answered Dick. "You have been deceived enough by city sharpers, and I do not want to see you in their clutches any longer."

"You don't accuse Braddock Bowman of belonging to that class, do you?"

"I have never met the gentleman."

"He is above suspicion. Some time ago he became interested in the mystery of this house, and he firmly believes that the body taken from the water was not my child's. You see I am not long for earth. I want an heir, and I have enough to enrich the girl when she comes back to me."

Dodger Dick was about to reply, when a noise beyond the door at his back attracted his attention.

"It is probably my friend," observed the ex-banker. "You will know that I trust him when I tell you that he has the *entree* to this house at all hours."

A moment later the door was opened and a tall, sallow complexioned man, with brilliant eyes and a cat like tread, entered the library.

Dodger Dick recognized him by intuition.

It was Braddock Bowman.

"We were just speaking about you, colonel," exclaimed Tuscan, glancing from his visitor to Dick, as if to note the effect of the encounter on the boy. "This gentleman, boy, is my friend, Mr. Bowman—my trusted friend, too, I am glad to say."

Already the piercing eyes of the head plotter were riveted upon Dick. They seemed to look him through and through, but the scrutiny did not last long.

"Have I interrupted your business with this boy?" he asked, turning to the ex-banker. "If you wish to finish I will drop out a while." And suiting action to his words, the speaker withdrew before a remonstrance could be put in.

"That is the gentleman who gives me hope," Tully Tuscan resumed, speaking to Dick, who had drawn a long breath over the sharp's departure. "He is worth more than all the detec-

tives I have employed since the terrible stroke. What do you think of him?"

Dodger Dick could not prevent the response that seemed to leap to his lips.

He left his chair and sprung across the space which separated him from the ex-banker.

"Maybe you won't listen to me," he exclaimed, touching Tuscan's arm as he leaned toward him. "I don't know whether you have ever been warned or not. If that is the man you are trusting—if he be the Braddock Bowman you found your faith on, let me say for heaven's sake don't let it go any further."

For a second there was no answer, for the ex-banker, flushed and indignant, had drawn back and was staring at the wharf ferret.

"Be careful!" he suddenly exclaimed. "You can't afford to accuse Braddock Bowman of any chicanery. He is going to restore my child, I tell you. He has found the trail which the sleuths of New York gave up years ago. See here! I won't listen to anything against a man like him. There!"

Dick dropped the man's arm and recoiled.

He seemed to see through the whole dark plot at a single look.

"I do warn you," he went on. "Whether you want to hear of it or not, Mr. Tuscan, I say beware of Braddock Bowman. He can no more restore your child than I can buy the big bridge."

"Take care!" flashed the millionaire. "Did you come hither to poison my mind against him?"

"I came to keep you from being robbed. One of the darkest schemes ever hatched in this city is afoot. It is aimed against you. I say again, you don't want to trust the man you have taken into your confidence. That is all."

Dodger Dick seized his hat, and moved toward the door.

"You've got a game, too, I see," cried the ex-banker. "I thought your visit would develop something. Don't come here any more with the intention of setting me against my best friend. Remember! Good-night, boy."

Thus dismissed, the young sleuth of the docks had nothing to do but to quit the house. With a parting look at Tully Tuscan he turned away, and hurried to the front door.

As his hand touched the knob a slight noise behind him caused him to turn his head.

"Ah! the serpent in the nest!" he mentally exclaimed, for at the end of the hall stood, with eyes aglare with triumph, the figure of Braddock Bowman.

CHAPTER IX.

CAUGHT.

DODGER DICK gave the chief of the conspirators a quick but searching look, and bolted from the house.

He did not at that time desire a personal encounter with Braddock Bowman, but deemed it expedient to betake himself from his presence as quickly as possible.

"Who was that youngster?" asked the sallow man, when he suddenly confronted Tully Tuscan in his chair five seconds after Dick's exit.

"A boy who doesn't like you, I should think," was the answer.

"And I don't like boys of his get-up, so there's no love lost," retorted Bowman. "He doesn't like me, eh?"

"He does not."

"What did the young rascal say?"

The city schemer had dropped into the chair lately occupied by Dick, and he spoke with his eyes fixed eagerly on the old millionaire.

"He wanted me to drop you, ha, ha!" laughed Tuscan.

"He did, eh? Was that all?"

"About all."

"What did he urge against me?"

"Inability on your part to find my child."

A cloud settled over Braddock Bowman's brows, and from beneath the under edge darted the lightnings of his eyes.

"By Jove! I wish now I had caught the boy liar!" he exclaimed. "I presume he hadn't the honesty to give his name?"

"Yes, he had, or at least he left a name."

"What was it?"

"Richard Sly."

The head plotter started; he could not help it.

"These young gutter-snipes have the impudence of Satan," he said, and then he laughed as he continued. "Of course you will give me the cold shoulder. I think you will have to, after what the meddler said, eh, Tuscan?"

Both men were laughing together at the conclusion of the last sentence, but the ex-banker suddenly became serious.

"I don't let a meddling street gamin drive

away a trusted friend," he remarked. "I told him so in very few words, and I think he understood them. If he did not, it was not my fault. Let's dismiss the boy whom you must have crossed, somehow, Braddock. What is your latest news?"

"Well, I am following up the trail," was the reply. "The lead I struck last is certain to prove the right one. A few more days, Tuscan, and you will be the happiest man in New York."

"And the richest!" cried the millionaire. "Days seem years to me now; minutes, days. There must be no mistake, you know."

"I have never made one," was the confident rejoinder. "I am obliged to go out of the city for the present."

"In my service?" eagerly asked the ex-banker.

"Well, yes."

"Then you will need something," and Tuscan moved his chair to a private desk near by. "How much, think you?" he added over his shoulder.

"Five hundred, perhaps."

For a moment the nabob wrote rapidly on a piece of paper, which he took from a pigeon-hole, and then passed his work to the conspirator.

"I don't want you to do things by halves," he smiled, glancing at the check, which was for one thousand dollars. "My child must come back if it takes every dollar I possess."

Braddock Bowman expressed his surprise and his thanks and rose to go as he tucked the liberal check away in his pocket.

"Won't the next report almost settle the matter?" queried the ex-banker, looking up into the sharper's face.

"I hope so."

There was an interchange of good-nights, and the head of the black-mailing league went down the broad steps of the millionaire's mansion richer by one thousand dollars than when he entered it.

"A wine cask that stands a good deal of tapping!" he chuckled to himself while he walked away. "I isn't the first time he has doubled the amount asked for. Jupiter! I'm glad I got on to that boy's work to-night. He made poor headway with Tuscan, though; but he must be looked after by the boys. We didn't have much trouble with Mr. Tracy Collins; that was managed well. This youngster, however, is a different breed of dogs, and is the fellow Kidd has talked about. He is Dodger Dick, the rat of the wharf, and a troublesome rat, too, from what I've heard of him."

Not long afterward Braddock Bowman entered the house in B— street, and was somewhat startled to find Muriel Jeffers in quiet possession of the room.

"I thought you'd come before long," exclaimed the sharp, greeting his partner. "I've been to Stella's—"

"Good! I want late news from there. How is the girl getting along?"

"She had one of her wild spells while I was there."

"Caused by the operation, I presume?"

"I don't know," Jeffers shook his head. "She wants out of the game."

"All of a sudden Braddock Bowman seemed to gasp."

"Wants—out—of—the—game?" he repeated.

"Great Scott! she was eager to enter it at the beginning."

"I know that."

"She can't quit it!" exclaimed the leader of the plot. "What does Stella say?"

"Stella is with us."

"I knew she would be. And the girl will stick, too. I'll risk that, Jeffers. The wrist is healing, eh?"

"Splendidly."

"Which is a piece of magnificent news. With the fly we caught in our net on his way to Australia, we can now turn on the rat left behind. It's a deuced pity we didn't send them both out with Captain Jeff."

"What other rat, colonel?" asked Jeffers. "I'm a little thick-headed to-night."

"The wharf spy!—the young sleuth to whom Collins was taking the hand when he lost it, thanks to Jack Pennell's boot. I know that he is still at work on the new case. He had the impudence to visit Tuscan to-night."

"Dodger Dick?" vociferated Jeffers.

"Dodger Dick."

"The young scamp!" was the response.

"Ay, he's worse than that."

"I presume he went there to give our scheme away?"

"Of course. He struck Tully Tuscan in a place that raised the old man's ire. But there's no telling what he might accomplish on a second

visit. Tuscan is peculiar, you know," and Bowman tapped his forehead in a significant manner.

Jeffers understood, for he nodded and smiled. "You must co-operate with Kidd in his efforts to cage the young rascal," the chief of the conspiracy proceeded. "I want it done as soon as possible. We can't afford to delay in a matter of this kind. Stella will keep the girl with us, and the nabob stands ready to recognize the person whom I present as his daughter. I leave the details to you and Kidd. Don't fail. On our success hangs the biggest fortune in the market."

Not a word about the check he had received from the banker millionaire. Braddock Bowman was keeping this little incident to himself.

Muriel Jeffers started off in search of Kidd Gauntlet, the New York sport.

"If I thought that we might fail, by Jupiter! I'd make a big haul for myself and withdraw quietly from the drama," muttered the villain with Bowman's house at his back. "I am expected to marry Stella to keep her solid, but don't like the woman; and, what is more, I know that Muriel Jeffers is the last man she would have. No matrimony for me, unless I could capture the Tuscan heiress, on whom, I believe, Kidd has his optics just now."

Meantime the Dodger had gone back to Mother Sturgeon's.

Stealing up-stairs and into the room on tip-toe, he found the old lady sitting up for him. As he did not see fit to deliver a report of his work, he was not questioned, and going to the little room he sometimes occupied, he made a change of clothes which completely altered his appearance.

"Now for a visit to Stella," he said to himself. "I got one more link of the chain at the ex-banker's house. If Braddock Bowman knew me, he will spread a net with the two confederates to manipulate it. He has got Tuscan firmly in his grasp. Nothing but a convincing thunderbolt will ever break the spell. It is a deeper and darker plot than I ever dreamed of. Tracy, who is bound to Australia, must be of the same opinion by this time."

Dick's idea in the change of suits was to deceive every one who might be following him, and when he left Mother Sturgeon's, he made good time toward the cage that held the money-league's victim.

He had no difficulty in going back to the place, for he knew to a nicety the streets of New York, and in a short time he reached the vicinity of the building.

He had never seen Stella, did not know her full name, and the face of the girl Nora was equally unknown to him.

But Dodger Dick had never yet failed to be equal to any emergency that presented itself. Moving up the street, he soon found himself in front of the house, and the next moment he raised his hand to ring the bell.

All at once he was startled by a noise like a quick footfall, and as he wheeled, a hand fell on his shoulder and closed there.

Dick drew back and looked up.

One glance was enough.

He had fallen into the hands of Kidd Gauntlet!

CHAPTER X.

WHAT THE CATCHER DID.

THE young detective's situation was not a pleasant one.

By the merest chance, though Dick did not know it, he had dropped into the power of the very man he did not want to meet at that time.

"What is it, sir?" exclaimed Dick, putting on a bold face, which he believed was the best thing he could do under the circumstances.

"I guess you ought to know without asking," was the reply. "You did not expect to find any one on hand, eh? I presume not, my wharf chippie. Walk along. I am going into the house you were about to visit, as you see."

Kidd Gauntlet's superior strength almost dragged Dick across the threshold, and he was in the house supposed to be occupied by Stella as soon as he could have got there by other means.

What would follow his arrest by Braddock Bowman's right-hand man?

The question came into the boy's mind without effort.

He was certainly in very dangerous toils.

Captain Kidd took his young prisoner down the narrow hall which stretched from the door and out into a small back court with a high board fence on two sides. A wooden stairway ran up to a door in the second story, and soon after his exit from the house, Dodger Dick was

climbing it, still in the clutches of the scamp who had caught him.

"Maybe I will get to see *them*, after all," muttered Dick, but he was doomed to have the thought dissipated, although he was to obtain some information, possibly another link in the chain.

From the landing above he was ushered into a room by his captor, and, before he could resist, a pair of handcuffs gripped his wrists.

"How do you like it?" laughed the man, who had struck a light, which enabled Dick to take in the room and the fine figure and grinning face of Kidd Gauntlet. "After this you will have your peepers open, won't you? By Jupiter! I didn't expect a catch o' this kind, but I never throw aside a fish like you."

Before Dick could answer the man stepped toward him and continued:

"Have you found out anything, Dodger Dick?" he exclaimed. "What has become of your partner; the Bowery dude?"

"You know very well," cried the boy, returning the sharper's looks with interest. "You are aware that Tracy Collins is on his way to Australia, watched by Captain Jeff, of the Ocean Oriole."

"Jove's teeth! you're a good one!" broke out the city villain. "If the dude is where you say, he will see wonders in a wonderful land before he shines again on the streets of New York. You ought to be with him, don't you know, Dodger?"

"I don't think it is your fault that I am not. You were bound to get one witness out of the way."

"One witness to what?" And Kidd bent suddenly over the boy, and a mad light came into his eyes and sparkled there. "We know you're always nosing round, like a ferrier. What kind of a rat's nest do you think you've found now?"

"A pretty big one, if I'm not mistaken."

At this juncture a noise was heard beyond one of the two doors that opened into the room.

Kidd Gauntlet held back the words he was about to speak.

"For mercy's sake relieve me of this terrible agony!" cried a voice, distinctly heard by boy and man. "All for gold, the curse of human-kind and the coin of Satan! I suffer a thousand deaths. Take the bandages off—off, Stella! for Heaven's sake!"

The cry ended in a wail of agony that pierced the heart of the manacled boy.

He sprang up, but the hand of Captain Kidd dropped on his shoulder and pushed him back into the chair.

"Sit still! It is nothing," said Kidd Gauntlet, sternly.

Dodger Dick knew better, but he did not speak.

He knew that the creature of his quest was beyond the door, that the young victim of Braddock Bowman's dastardly scheme was almost within arm's reach, but he could not help her.

After the agonizing appeal, to which there was no response, as though some one had stifled the speaker, silence settled down over the scene.

The man walked to an old-fashioned bureau on one side of the room, and unlocked a drawer. Dick watched him closely, and saw him take from it a small box, which he thrust into one of his pockets, and then came back to him.

"I guess we'll go now," he remarked, taking the wharf spy's arm. "This is no hotel, boy, therefore it can't accommodate you. We may get upon the streets before we are through with our walk, and I want to say right here that I am equal to any turn you attempt to take. You are in the hands of Captain Kidd. Don't forget this for a single second."

Dodger Dick made no response, and then he was conducted from the room and down the stairway into the back yard.

Instead of going through the house to the street where the catch had taken place, Kidd Gauntlet conveyed his prisoner through the yard to the rather dark thoroughfare beyond.

He still held Dick's arm in his grasp, and the two passed down the street unnoticed by the few people whom they met.

"I'm in for an adventure of some kind," thought the boy spotter. "The same men who caught Tracy and sent him to Australia are fighting me, and from what I know of them, they are sharps without mercy. They will have to play the cards well if they hope to win. I see through the whole scheme now. The cry of the young girl tells me that they have maimed her to carry out their designs on Tully Tuscan's riches. Watch me well, Captain Kidd. The wharf rat can get through a very small hole."

For some time Dick was conducted out of one street and into another.

Kidd Gauntlet was not willing to trust his prisoner to the light of the street cars, and he kept on the shadowed sides of the streets as much as possible.

In this manner he walked Dodger Dick a long distance, but not over a route which was not well known to him.

All the time the keen eyes of Dick were on the alert. He noticed the houses, the crooks in the streets, in fact, everything.

Nearer and nearer they approached to the river.

"Hello! I am getting back to my old stamping-ground!" suddenly exclaimed the boy. "I wonder that Captain Kidd would bring me to the wharves when he knows I am at home here. There is Captain Jeff around to book me for Australia. What can the fellow's tactics be?"

Kidd Gauntlet partly answered the young detective by walking almost straight to the river.

As the two approached the edge of one of the piers a figure slid down from a pile of boxes and appeared like an imp at the sharper's side.

"Want a boat, don't yer, gents?" he asked.

Kidd Gauntlet looked at the fellow and seemed to size him up at a glance.

Dick's eyes were not idle, either.

"We might want a boat," said Kidd, slowly.

"Where is yours?"

"Right on hand, sir," replied the harbor oar, pointing down to the water swishing under their feet.

Kidd looked at the fellow a second time.

"Get her ready for us," he continued.

The young boat-owner sprang away and lowered himself over the dock.

"I know him," muttered Dick. "There's few oars along the wharves of Gotham I don't know. This fellow is Red Rufus who never liked me very well; but he hasn't recognized me yet."

It did not take the dock carman long to bring his boat up to the logs, and Kidd Gauntlet lifted Dick over the edge.

"Look to the boy, if you please," he said, to the person in the boat. "I am an officer, and, as you will see, the chippie is in bracelets."

Dick hardly touched the bottom of the boat ere the Gotham sharp came down himself, and the following moment Red Rufus buried his oars in the water.

"Which way?" he asked in undertones, leaning toward the gold-bug.

"Down the harbor till further orders."

There was no reply, for none was needed, and the sturdy young wharfer bent to the strong oars with a will.

It was a light boat with a cutting keel, and under the rapid strokes it went through the water like a driven knife.

Dodger Dick instinctively turned his gaze toward the city, and saw the thousand and one lights that seemed to mock him with their unwanted brilliancy.

Was there a vessel in the harbor ready to receive him as the Ocean Oriole had received Tracy Collins?

On, on went the boat.

A strong night wind came in from the sea, and the lights of New York grew fewer as the boat pursued its way.

At last the little company reached the open harbor.

The water was dark and restless on every side.

All at once the hand of Kidd Gauntlet closed on the arm of the boy detective.

"If you dare!" cried Dick, drawing back from the leering face which almost touched his.

"I dare anything, my young rat!" was the quick response, and the next second the dock ferret was lifted from his seat and thrown into the water.

All this was but a moment's work.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE OF CRIME'S BLUNDERS.

RED RUFUS, the young harbor oar, was greatly startled by this sudden move on Kidd Gauntlet's part.

As he had not witnessed the whole proceeding, he at first thought that the boy prisoner had sprung overboard with the intention of escaping, and he instinctively brought the boat about for the purpose of pursuit.

But, all at once, the city sharp darted forward and clutched his wrist with a grip of steel.

"Let the young rascal go," he said sternly, as he looked the young boatman in the eye. "I have hired this boat for the time, and you are under my orders. Is this not so?"

"Yes, but—"

"No 'buts' just now, if you please. Pull back to the city!"

Not until then did it enter Red Rufus's head that there had been foul play, but as he was not over scrupulous concerning the secrets he was expected to carry, he turned to the blades and rowed back.

"Hello! what is this at my feet?" suddenly cried the oarsman, and he kicked something which emitted a metallic sound. "By Jericho! captain, your chippie slipped the bracelets before he went over."

Kidd Gauntlet had already bent forward, and a look of amazement settled over his face as he picked up the objects that had attracted the dock oar.

A pair of handcuffs!

"I don't see how he slipped 'em!" exclaimed Kidd aloud while he held the steel bracelets up and inspected them with wondering eyes.

"Them rats are cute ones," grinned Red Rufus. "I never saw a trap that could hold 'em if they really wanted out."

"The trap back yonder will hold him," replied Kidd, nodding toward the scene of Dodger Dick's last adventure. "Work 'er along, my man. A little faster if you can."

The boat was not long getting back to the pier where its proprietor waited for patrons when not employed, and Kidd drew his purse to pay the boatman off.

"I shall have to report that my catch gave me the slip," he remarked with a smile, as he counted out a liberal fee. "Of course you don't know anything about it, Red Rufus?"

The young fellow shook his head.

"I'll want you again some time at big pay," continued the sharper. "I like your work. You look like a fellow who knows the value of a quiet tongue."

"I guess I do that, captain. That which isn't my business is never inquired into. Come back some time. Ah! good-night." And Red Rufus touched his hat to Captain Kidd as the latter vanished toward the houses a short distance away.

The New York sharp went directly to his room, and not to the house occupied by Stella and the fair tool of the three conspirators.

"I'm going to look up the old accounts and the photographs," he murmured when he had lit the gas with the door of the apartment locked to all intruders. "Up to this time we've followed Braddock's orders. Now the way is clear, thanks to the admirable catch I made to-night in front of Stella's house, and we have only to wait for the healing of the wrist."

Not long afterward Mr. Kidd Gauntlet was seated at a table on which he had placed a lot of newspaper clippings and some pictures and photographs, all with some age on them as could be seen without very close inspection.

The pictures were those of a little girl apparently nine years old, and under several was printed a description of the child, her name, age, characteristics and so on.

Kidd did not care much for the description, but he studied the features closely for some time.

"I can see the resemblance," he said in audible tones to himself. "I am not surprised that the boss should select Nora for the role. She is very much like this child who is little Dora Tuscan, the millionaire's offspring. It is a shrewd game, sure enough—just the kind to find a place in Brad Bowman's brain. So much for the pictures," and he pushed the whole lot aside. "All we want is for Stella to bring the girl around. She made a bad break to-night, and the boy heard her; but I guess he won't tell any one."

Captain Kidd turned to the newspaper cuttings and selected one which he began to read with considerable care.

All at once he started, leaned forward and held the paper nearer the light.

"What is this?" he cried. "Great Scott! have we blundered at the start of the game?"

The next moment the Gotham night-hawk was on his feet.

"This is what comes of carrying out orders without asking any questions!" he went on, with hardly a vestige of color in his face. "Where is Jeffers? By Jove! I must consult with him without losing time. And then with the boss? I don't know about that."

The man gathered up photographs and clippings and replaced them in the trunk from which they had been taken. He was in a hurry, and worked rapidly as if eager to get away.

Down on the street he went off like a mad pedestrian.

"Look here!" he cried, bursting into a certain room a few minutes later and confronting

the sleek face of Muriel Jeffers. "I've made a discovery that sets us down for a choice lot of fools."

"What is it?" was the question while the asker colored. "You drop your thunderbolts without warning, Kidd."

Kidd Gauntlet drew a chair up to the table at which Jeffers sat, and dropping his voice to low tones, talked earnestly for a few moments.

"You see the fix we're in," he finished, drawing back and looking at his confederate. "What do you propose?"

Jeffers did not speak. He sat like a man who had heard a report damaging to his hopes.

"I guess I've stunned you," laughed Kidd.

"I should say you have," was the answer. "But all is not lost. We must go to the captain with the discovery. He gave the orders and he alone is responsible."

"That is true. It is a terrible blunder."

"But not a fatal one. I looked for you to-night. We are to entrap the dock rat as quickly as possible."

"The trap has been sprung already," laughed Kidd. "The way was clear when I discovered our blunder."

"Well, I'm glad the ferret is out of the game. As for the girl, there are more like her in New York."

"But it lengthens the play, don't you see?"

"Yes."

"Stella hasn't found it out yet."

"There'll be music for a spell when Braddock Bowman gets onto it."

"He doesn't want to turn on me!" and Kidd Gauntlet's clinched hand rested on the table before his auditor. "I know entirely too much to stand any of his reproof. Come! we will go to him together."

The two villains left the house, and hastened up-town.

When they turned into B— street they were near the house occupied by Braddock Bowman.

"Let me manage him," whispered Captain Kidd to Jeffers as they mounted the steps side by side.

The answer was a quick nod of assent.

The head of the conspiracy received the two scoundrels in an easy-chair, and his eyes seemed to light up with anticipation when they dropped into seats near by.

"Captain, we're here on important business," began Kidd. "The fact is, we've just made a startling discovery which I'm afraid may interrupt the game for a time."

Already Bowman was looking searchingly at the speaker, and he seemed to be trying to anticipate.

"You will pardon me, but let me ask which hand little Dora Tuscan did not possess when she turned up missing."

"That's an odd question," answered the chief of the cabal. "Why you ought to know, since you attended to the late amputation."

"That is all right. We only carried out your commands. You planned the whole affair, and it wasn't our place to do anything but perform the work you set before us. Now, sir, be kind enough to answer me. Which hand did the Tuscan heiress want?"

"The left one, of course."

"That is the one we cut off," Kidd said, with a swift glance toward Jeffers.

"And, of course, it is the proper one."

"Will you look at the accounts, captain?"

There was a singular expression on Braddock Bowman's face as he moved his chair to a desk, which he opened.

The two men watched him like a pair of hawks.

"Murdered Caesar!" he exclaimed, looking up from a paper which he had taken from a pigeon-hole. "In Heaven's name, how did I get that mistake in my head?" and he presented to the two rascals a face white and horror-stricken.

"The right hand was missing. And we have cut off the left one."

Kidd Gauntlet nodded, and Bowman sunk back in the chair in a maze of astonishment.

"The biggest blunder of my life!" he cried. "If I had been put on oath I would have said it was the left hand. We can't go to Tully Tuscan with a card of this kind. The old fellow's mind is not just what it should be, but, then, we can't deceive him with the wrong hand."

"What is to be done?"

"Done? We must find another Dora Tuscan!" came promptly over Bowman's lips. "The million is ours for the playing. A discovery of this kind must not stop us. We have Stella to search the city in company with our own efforts."

"But the girl—Nora?" asked Kidd.

"She can be kept in the dark awhile. By and by Captain Jeff will come back from Australia, and then we will give him another passenger. If she gets too fresh, we will not wait for the Oriole. One big play, and the right hand next time, and we are healed for life."

Muriel Jeffers and Kidd Gauntlet looked at the master without speaking.

What a head he had for expedients. Nothing baffled him.

CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING RETURN.

It was just one week after the last events we have recorded, and Tully Tuscan, the ex-banker, was seated on a bench in a Park, about two squares from his house. Since the loss of his child Dora, the old man had not ventured downtown often, so that the scenes of the acquirement of his wealth had long missed him.

He seldom ventured further than the Park, and never during the busy hours of day! for the unprincipled classes of the city had come to know him pretty well, and were ready to spin some adroit tales calculated to raise his hopes, and to strengthen the condition of their pocket-books.

On the present occasion, however, the millionaire had selected his usual retired seat in the Park, and seemed to be enjoying the cool of the evening which was slowly giving way to a rare summer night.

He had not seen Braddock Bowman since he gave him the thousand-dollar check, and perhaps he wondered what had become of the man.

Though he had learned much of the deceitfulness of mankind since the fall of the blow that had crushed him, Tully Tuscan had not yet suspected the sallow schemer who could coin an atrocious falsehood with excellent grace.

A hundred people had bled him within the past few years, but Braddock Bowman was not of that sort. No; among the rascals he was honest. Poor old man! Blind to everything but the overpowering desire to fold the long-missing child to his heart, he could not see behind the mask the prince of villains wore.

Almost suddenly a man appeared before the ex-banker, and ere he could be fairly recognized, took a seat on the bench beside him.

The millionaire looked up, and then gave vent to an exclamation of gladness.

Braddock Bowman had come back!

"I've had quite a hunt!" assured the adroit schemer, in response to the old man's eager interrogative, "What news have you for me now?"

"Out of the city?" Tuscan went on.

"Yes. I haven't been back two hours. I've seen several trails in my time, but this is the most perplexing one. However, I know more now than I knew when I saw you last. The cloud has got a real silver lining."

"Thank Heaven!" broke out the ex-banker, with fervor. "When am I to be rewarded for my long hoping against hope?"

"A few days will see the end."

Tuscan sighed.

"Years! years!" he cried. "Always a few days! But don't think I fault you," he added quickly, seizing Bowman's arm. "I know you are doing your duty. You are the best friend I have had since that terrible time which roaring New York forgot long ago. A few days yet? I will wait. Heaven give me strength to hold out."

Braddock Bowman looked around with his sharp eyes, but did not see any one suspicious.

"I wish you could tell me that you have actually seen her," Tuscan suddenly resumed. "That would be a great deal."

The plotter smiled.

"I have come very near it," he replied.

"That is good. It tells me that you must be on the right trail."

"I am!" cried Bowman confidently.

At that moment not far away the figure of a young man crossed one of the Park paths.

Braddock Bowman started as if he had seen a shadow from the mystic world.

"I'll see you before long," he exclaimed, springing to his feet and tapping Tuscan on the shoulder. "Just now I saw a person whom I do not want to lose." And before he could be questioned, he was off like an arrow.

"If my eyes did not deceive me, what has happened?" the New York sharp ejaculated. "I took Jeffers's word for it that he left the city at a certain time. Can it be possible that he is back?"

It was apparent that Bowman had seen some one of great importance just then, for he was

flushing across the square with the air of a man in close pursuit of an enemy.

"There he goes!" he muttered when he reached the curb of a certain street. "That is the person I saw a minute ago. Now let me get a good look at him."

As the speaker pushed forward again he pulled the brim of his hat over his brow, and fixed his eyes on the party who had startled him.

"I am right! my eyes seldom fool me. But I'd like to know how he got back."

By this time Bowman's agile steps had brought him up with the person whom he pursued. The next moment he flitted past him like a ghost.

"Well, if you have come back you'll be in another trap before to-morrow night," cried the sharper, eyeing the individual who as yet had not discovered that he was so closely watched. "Did Captain Jeff play us false? Or was the story Jeffers told me a lie out o' whole cloth?"

True it was, as Braddock Bowman saw with his own eyes, that Tracy Collins, the whilom dude, was back in New York!

Australia had not received him, and, barely a week after his sailing in the Ocean Oriole, he was again on the streets he knew so well.

The return was enough to surprise the fortune-hunter.

If he had looked closer he would have seen that ocean winds and suns had altered the youth's complexion, and that he had lost the peculiar gait by which he was known everywhere. His color was better, his eye brighter and the seat of new eagerness, and his figure had undergone a beneficial change.

In short, the dude had been lost, and Tracy Collins had come back from his involuntary voyage a new person.

It was the easiest thing in the world for Braddock Bowman to guess that the youth would have no pleasant thoughts of him. He felt that he had in his path a dangerous young foe who would fight him with deadly weapons and with a strong probability of winning unless he was speedily surprised and checked.

"You'd give all you're worth to find me just now, wouldn't you?" grinned Bowman, while he eyed the young man. "You may see me when you do not expect to have that pleasure. If you are looking for the dock rat you will have to get a boat at the pier!"

As for Tracy Collins, he kept on entirely ignorant of the villain's espionage, and did not stop until he reached the door of a quiet house in a street near the Bowery.

He had barely crossed the threshold when a cry was heard, and then he was looking down into the delighted face of Roxy, the young girl who was the maid-of-all-work in the boarding-house.

"Where in the world have you been?" cried the girl, and then she drew back and noticed the change which had taken place since the youth's absence.

"Not now, Roxy. Let me have a breathing-spell," he replied, with a smile. "Has any one been here looking for me since I've been gone?"

"A boy came, but it was soon afterward."

"Within a week?"

"No, sir."

"I guess he gave me up long ago," said Tracy, and then he went up to his old quarters where he threw himself into a chair with an exclamation of mingled delight and gratitude.

"Say I am not glad to get back, will you?" he cried. "The past week has been a year to me. I counted the minutes as they went, and when I saw the spires of New York I felt a thrill I shall never feel again."

Just then a footstep sounded at the door, and the next moment he saw the impatient face of Roxy there.

"I hope you've had your breathing-spell," began the girl, venturing timidly into the room in a way that was simply irresistible. "Something has happened to you—something terrible. I began to feel so after the boy went away. Won't you tell me, Tracy?"

"Yes," and Roxy joined him with an expression of joy.

"I won't begin at the beginning for I don't want to be kept here long. There is work—hot, quick work—to be done, and I'm eager for the fray. I was the victim of a plot when I left this house last. I was drugged and taken on board a vessel bound for far off Australia. The fourth day out our ship became suddenly disabled, and the captain had to hoist the signal of distress. Fortunately it was seen by a bark bound for New York, and responded to. Captain Jeff thought to keep me below while he received the assistance he stood in need of, but when he least expected to see me, I was on deck,

and before the captain of the helping ship. There was a scene which I will not describe, Roxy. I denounced the villains who had entrapped me in terms that made Captain Jeff's eyes flash, and when Captain Owens promised to bring me back, I knew that Australia would never see Braddock Bowman's victim. That is why I am here. It is the story in a nutshell. I must ask you to keep it, Roxy, until I want it known. Fortune favored me in mid-ocean when I was in despair; but now I am back—back to unite with my young detective ally in breaking up the most infamous scheme ever hatched in Gotham. They caught me in one of their traps. They will never catch me in another!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EMPTY CAGE.

"WHAT do you think now?"

"What has happened?"

"Ah, you do not know. Then I have the monopoly of the discovery. The passenger of the Ocean Oriole is back."

"Tracy Collins, the dude?"

"There isn't a vestige of the dude left to him. A bit of sea-life has entirely transformed him, and I had to look twice before I recognized the young fellow."

"I cannot believe it. Captain Jeff promised eternal fealty, and said—"

"I can't help what he said—the fellow is back," and with a grim smile Braddock Bowman sought the depths of his chair, and looked up into Muriel Jeffers's face.

It was a short time after the ringleader's discovery of Tracy in the Park, and also after he had tracked the youth to his lodgings.

Jeffers was too astonished by the revelation to find his tongue for several moments.

Tracy Collins back in the city?

He did not like it, but it could not be helped.

"Let the youngster go for a little while," suddenly continued Bowman. "What do you think of the new tool we have found?"

"I am pleased with her. She will play her part to perfection. Of one thing I am certain this time. There will be no mistake as to the hand."

"That is true, Jeffers. The left one without fail. A cool million depends on the proper selection. Is Stella satisfied?"

"I think she is."

"You think so?" echoed Braddock Bowman in singular tones, as he started forward in his chair. "See here, Jeffers. I guess you'd better carry out the original plan, and as soon as possible. Stella must become Mrs. Jeffers."

"She may have a voice in that matter."

"Fudge! She will be as tame as a kitten at a word from me. We must make Stella solid. A good deal depends on her, for she knows the whole scheme. You must marry her, Jeffers."

The city sharp showed some uneasiness, but did not remonstrate.

"Kidd tells me that he has been watched for several days," Braddock went on.

"So have I."

"By whom?"

"Ah! that's what I'd like to know," was the answer. "The shadow hasn't had the gall to show himself so as to give me a chance to photograph him on my mind. I don't want to think that we have dropped under the eye of the men detectives of this city. It may be the boy who came back from the sea."

"Impossible. I believe he came back only today. Kidd was first followed several days ago."

"Yes."

"And you, when?"

"Night before last."

"Don't you see it is not the young dude?"

"I admit that it looks that way," said Jeffers.

"To-morrow night we perform the operation that is to get us the Tuscan bonanza. I believe we have secured the right person. There will be no remorse this time, and she won't throw us into hot water as the other one did. The new person's resemblance to Dora Tuscan's photographs is not as remarkable as Nora's was, but that does not matter so much, as the old man has said to me that he does not expect his child to look much like she did when she went off. The missing hand is to be the convincing proof. When was Nora last seen?"

"Yesterday."

"Well?"

"She won't bother us long, I think," and a smile came to the man's lips.

Braddock Bowman looked pleased.

"She is safe. Kidd says that escape is impossible."

"I think so, too."

"Now, Jeffers, I am going down to give the coming Dora Tuscan a lesson in her part. The girl is going to prove an apt pupil, but we don't want to make a single mistake. I know where Tracy Collins is, and when we three put our heads together, we'll set a trap that will catch him for the last time."

Bowman left the chair and began to prepare for a walk.

Muriel Jeffers watched him sharply while he made his toilet, and once or twice he seemed on the verge of addressing him; but he did not speak.

"Remember," said the head of the conspiracy, looking straight at his man. "I want this matter between Stella and yourself closed immediately."

"If you say so it shall be, but by Jove, colonel, I guess you'll have to bring her around, for my private opinion is that Muriel Jeffers has not the honor of being her matrimonial selection."

The sentence was completed by a light laugh in which Braddock Bowman did not join.

"I'll see her to night about it. You need not be present—"

"I'd rather not be," put in Jeffers. "It will be a business match, I presume."

"Entirely so. I would like to look in upon Nora."

"You can," responded Jeffers quickly. "We can take the house in on our way to Stella's."

"Which we will do."

By this time Bowman had completed his toilet and announced himself ready for the trip.

"I have promised Tuscan that he shall have his daughter at the end of thirty days, and so he shall!" smiled Braddock as the two men went to the door together. "I have him worked up to the proper pitch, and our 'find' will meet with a splendid reception."

"A hand for a million, eh?"

"Yes, and not one of our hands either," laughed Bowman.

The two men went down town and turned into a certain street where shade trees were so numerous as to shut off from many buildings the light of the lamps.

Jeffers led the way to a stone-front house, and suddenly plunged down some basement steps to be followed by Bowman who seemed willing to keep at his heels no matter where he went.

In the darkness at the foot of the steps Jeffers unlocked a door, and the two went forward, the hindmost one closing the portal behind them.

In a little while the conspirators found themselves in a well furnished room on the second floor of the house.

"It is very quiet," said Bowman, almost starting at the sound of his own voice. "What has become of the mistress of the place?"

Jeffers led the way into another room where he lit the gas, for the place was dark, and then listened a few moments.

"I don't like this," broke forth Bowman in no good humor. "You are sure we are in the right house?"

"Of course we are!" exclaimed Jeffers. "The girl is on the floor above and probably asleep."

"Let us go up."

The twain left the room and ascended a flight of steps with as little noise as possible.

"Here we are," whispered Jeffers halting at a door while he took several keys from his pocket.

"Look! your key is not needed," exclaimed Bowman, and then he pushed the door open for it was already ajar.

Muriel looked annoyed and shook his head.

"I don't like this," he cried, springing across the threshold, and then he struck a match on the wall.

The next moment a singular cry came from Braddock Bowman's throat.

"Where's your girl?" he vociferated, wheeling upon the astonished Jeffers whose face looked ghostly in the light of the match.

Jeffers could only shake his head.

Besides the two men who had invaded it, the little room was untenanted.

There were plenty of evidences of late habitation lying around, but the dweller was not to be seen.

"She may be elsewhere in the house," suggested Jeffers, when he recovered sufficiently to speak.

"I think not. Nora is gone—gone away," was the response. "What was her state of mind?"

"It was bad—bad."

"Would she be considered sane by the general public think you, Jeffers?"

"I can't say, sir. But we will talk about that when we know her to be lost."

"She is lost now."

"I say not," and Jeffers turned away. "This is a big house, and every door is kept locked. Stella is the jailer, and she left the girl here when she went off—for a spell. Nora could not get to the street unassisted. It is impossible. She is somewhere in the house."

Filled with doubts, Braddock Bowman followed his man from room to room.

From his movements Jeffers knew the house from top to bottom, and he gave it a systematic and thorough search.

"Well, what do you think now?" questioned Bowman, when his partner gave up the hunt, and stood before him perplexed and silent.

"You were right, Nora, the one-handed, is not in the house," was the reply.

"But you have said that she could not get out."

"She isn't here anyway. By Jupiter! I don't like mysteries of this kind."

"You haven't forgotten the shadow that has followed Kidd as well as yourself?"

Jeffers asserted.

"Heavens! you don't think the girl has been found and helped away by some one?"

"Doesn't it look like it, Jeffers?"

"It does, by Jove! But the question comes up—by whom? If, as you say, the young dude got back only to-day, he could not know anything about this house."

"That is true."

"Then what ferret has found the girl?"

"That is what puzzles me."

All at once Jeffers started forward and caught Bowman's arm.

"Great Caesar!" he cried. "Maybe Kidd failed to drown the dock ferret!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A POOR MATCHMAKER.

BRADDOCK BOWMAN did not speak for a little while.

"No," said he, resolutely. "Kidd did not bungle that job. If he had, Dodger Dick would have showed up in some manner ere this. My opinion is—"

"What?" asked Jeffers, eagerly.

"The girl, Nora, must have escaped without assistance. We have no evidences that anybody from the outside got in here."

"And none that she got out; but certain it is that she is not here now."

The chief of the money league looked perplexed.

"Stella may be able to throw some light on the mystery," he said, at length, and then he turned to go. "To Stella! If you don't want to meet her, seeing that I am going to play a matrimonial hand in your interests, you may hunt for Nora's trail."

"I'll do it!" cried Jeffers. "Stella may have removed the girl for some reason, but I think not."

Half an hour later Braddock Bowman, closely regarded by a pair of youthful and brilliant eyes, was admitted to a house some distance from the one he had lately searched for Nora, the one-handed.

"I am glad you have come," exclaimed the fine-looking young woman, who confronted him in a well furnished room on the second floor.

"Well, what is it, Stella?"

"I want to say a word in behalf of Nora. The girl is going down-hill rapidly. The loss of her hand is killing her by inches." Here the speaker dropped her voice to a whisper and glanced toward a closed door on her right. "Can't you let her have a little liberty?" she went on. "You know I am with you in the game for the Tuscan gold; but I am still a woman. The girl needs air."

At the end of Stella's last sentence Bowman broke into a derisive laugh.

"Air, Stella?" he cried. "If that is what she wants, I guess she's enjoyed her share of it by this time."

The woman instantly lost color.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed.

"Then, by heavens! you know nothing about the girl."

"Is—she—gone?"

Gasping the question, Stella went back with dilated eyes fixed on the New York sharp.

"Well, she wasn't in the house when I left it a little while ago, and I searched it from basement to attic."

"My God!"

The woman was thoroughly alarmed.

"Well, let her go! We've got another and a

better one," he resumed, in braggadocio style.

"Not one in a thousand will believe her story."

"Can we risk it?" asked the young woman.

"Yes! You saw her last."

"I left her a little after noon to-day. She was sleeping in her apartments."

"Had she talked about me lately?"

"No. But you must not think she has forgotten you."

"I presume not," answered Bowman, with a peculiar smile. "I shall put Kidd and Muriel on her trail, and they will soon find her. Aren't you sorry you have lost your prisoner, Stella?"

"In one sense of the term, I am," was the response. "The girl's misfortunes have made me pity her. We made the terrible mistake of amputating the wrong hand, and instead of becoming a millionaire's heiress, she goes out into the streets of New York a beggar."

The reckless plotter did not reply.

"Nora is dangerous because she knows all," proceeded Stella. "She is capable of giving the police some startling information; but she will not do that, I think."

"Why not?"

"She has told me within the last few days that she was tired of life, and would never figure in another drama of any kind. Once since her removal I prevented her from throwing herself to the bottom of the stairs."

The eyes of Braddock Bowman got a sudden flash of joy.

"Maybe she went to the docks!" he exclaimed. "Girls in despair do that sometimes, you know."

"Yes."

"After all, she may have favored us with a performance of this kind," he continued, cruelly. "We must watch the papers to-morrow. But let us dismiss the old for the new. Where is the Tuscan heiress?"

Stella turned toward the nearest door which she opened, and spoke a few words to some one in the other room.

A moment later a young girl with pleasing though not very beautiful features, came forward and bowed to Braddock Bowman, at whom she looked through long black lashes.

The man looked her over from head to foot and seemed well pleased.

"There must be no failure!" she cried. "I am to part with that, you see!" and she put forth her left hand on which a ring glittered. "I guess it's worth a million. Don't you think it is?"

The sharper laughed, but Stella remained serious while she regarded the girl with a singular look in which pity and contempt seemed to mingle.

"She resembles the pictures, doesn't she?" Bowman said, glancing from the false heiress to Stella.

"I think so."

"Tuscan will take her to his bosom with one glance at the left wrist."

Then he went forward and halted before the young creature.

"It is not too late for you to back out," he resumed. "To-morrow night you will be maimed for life, but there is a million in it. I give you a chance to recede now."

"I am ready to go ahead," was the retort, as the graceful figure of the girl was drawn proudly up, and her eyes sparkled. "If the sacrifice of a hand will lift me from poverty to wealth, I am at your command. I've tasted the dregs of penury. From childhood I have eaten the bread of the beggar, and all the while I yearned to be like my richer sisters. God knows why I am poor, and they surrounded by luxury. Take my hand and give me a life of ease! If I am maimed, thank Heaven, I shall live in silk, and laugh at the rags I have worn."

"By Jove! you're the girl we want!" cried Bowman, but at Stella's lips rested a sneer for the words she had just heard.

"Remember! To-morrow night," resumed the villain to the ambitious girl.

"At what hour?"

"At ten."

"Then at ten o'clock I cross the line that divides wealth and misery! Well, after all I have not lived in vain."

And leaving Bowman and Stella to themselves, the speaker walked away and disappeared in the adjoining apartment.

"If we had only found her first!" Stella exclaimed. "She would sell her head to shine awhile in a golden net. She will play the game out, or her part of it, with surprising cunning."

"Then we shall win. Stella, my princess, I have found a deserving fellow who wants to settle down with an excellent woman."

Stella flushed.

"Tell him of the one in yonder!" she smiled, pointing to the door. "I am not in the market, as you know."

"Not in the market, eh? I think I can interpret you. I am serious, Stella. I have found a husband for you."

"How clever you are!" and the woman showed her pearly teeth in a light laugh.

"You will listen, won't you, Stella?"

"Yes. Go on."

"I have a friend who is anxious to secure one of the best wives in Gotham. He will soon be in possession of almost unlimited wealth, which, added to your share of the fortune, will be something immense. He is a man of excellent judgment, cool, rather handsome, and clear-headed. I have picked him out from all the men I know for you. What is your answer?"

Already the face before Braddock Bowman had lost its sparkling expression for one more serious.

"You would give me no choice in this matter," Stella said, her voice changed and her bosom rising and falling with excitement. "I presume I have to accept your selection. Well, I will hear you a little further, Braddock Bowman. Who is this lover you have chosen for me?"

"It is Muriel."

The next instant Stella stepped back, her eyes on fire, and her white hands nervously clinched.

"Muriel Jeffers, is it?" came through tightened teeth. "Am I to be given in marriage to this wretch with whom I am now associated in a scheme at which my very soul revolts? You want me to become the wife of the man who actually wanted to complete the work of the surgeon's knife by taking the life of Nora when he found that we could not use her! What is the reason, Braddock Bowman? Do you mistrust me? Are you afraid that I will quit the game? And to keep me 'solid,' as you term it, you would bind me to one of the deepest villains within the limits of New York. No! A thousand times, no! In an evil hour for love of gold I promised to help you to the Tuscan fortune; but I would sooner pick rags from the gutters of Gotham than shine as Muriel Jeffers's wife!"

Braddock Bowman saw her lips meet like the doors of doom behind the last sentence.

"I guess that settles it," he muttered. "I won't stay another minute to hear any more. I want to put the boys on the girl's track, and on somebody else's." And Stella saw him depart with unfeigned delight.

CHAPTER XV.

WORDS IN TIME.

TRACY COLLINS had returned to New York on the day of his discovery in the Park by Braddock Bowman.

The young man had been extremely fortunate in escaping from the vessel which was carrying him to Australia under the watchful eyes of Captain Jeff.

But for the firmness of Captain Owens, whose ship had come to the rescue of the Ocean Oriole, he would not have been taken from the sea-trap.

He no longer doubted that Captain Jeff was ready to do Bowman's bidding at any time, and he hoped to see the day when he could pay the skipper back for his guilty work.

After he had given Roxy in a nutshell an account of his adventures, Tracy set out to find Dodger Dick.

More than a week had elapsed since his parting with the wharf-spy detective.

He did not know what had happened during this time, and he was eager to hear Dick's story of the progress he had made.

It was dark when the youth found himself at the house on the wharf frequented by the Dodger when he was not under Mother Sturgeon's roof; but the parties in charge of it could not or would not, Tracy thought the latter, give him any information.

"Is it possible that I have lost Dick?" muttered the disappointed youth when he turned away. "If I have to fight the rascals alone, I will have my hands full, and I need a helper with the cunning which the Dodger possesses. Of course I can go to the police with my story, but they spoil things so often that I don't want to call them in until the trap is ready to catch the gang."

When Tracy emerged from the boarding-house, some windows of which looked out over the river, he was espied by a pair of eyes that exhibited astonishment at the sight of him.

"Hang me if the rat didn't get away from Captain Jeff!" exclaimed the owner of the eyes.

"He surely left in the Oriole, for Muriel took him on board, and Jeff promised to land him in Melbourne if he did not accidentally lose him on the way. I wonder if Braddock and Jeffers are aware of his return? The dude knows too much. The dude, eh? He doesn't look like one any more."

Tracy walked away with a veritable city slipper on his track.

"I'd better house him and then report," continued the man, addressing himself. "The chippie knows too much, I say."

Need we say that the person after Tracy was our old acquaintance, Kidd Gauntlet?

The fellow had gone to the river for the purpose of finding a certain young man who one week before had rowed him out into the harbor.

As he had failed to find the river oar, he was coming back, when he chanced to encounter the youth supposed to be on his way to Australia.

What discovery could have been more opportune than this?

When Tracy turned into a prominent street a short distance from the piers, Captain Kidd was very close upon him.

The eyes of the sharp had not lost sight of him since the finding, and Kidd's silken fingers were eager to show the boy that they could hold one like a vise.

Up to this time the returned prisoner was totally unaware of the danger that menaced him.

"A little further, my bird," chuckled Kidd. "Give your wings a little more play, and then I will clip them as neatly as you please."

Suddenly a boy of his own size brushed Tracy's arm. The contact was not an accidental one, for when the hunted youth looked he saw a pair of eyes that appeared singularly familiar.

"You are followed," said the young person at his side—a boy with rather slouchy garments and dark features. "Don't look back, but dive into the first store, pass through it and come out on the street."

Followed!

Tracy felt a thrill dart through his frame.

If he was followed, of course it was by the League of the Missing Hand, and the men who had exiled him to the ocean continent.

"Do your vanishing quick. You haven't got any time to lose," continued the strange boy in the same breath which had given the first warning. "Here's a handy store now. Into it like a rat into his hole when the cat comes!"

Tracy saw the youth vanish ahead of him as the voice ceased.

"There's something in this," he thought. "I'll obey the boy and trust to luck afterward."

A second later he turned and entered the open door that seemed to invite him forward, and passing through the store-room, he gained the street beyond.

"How did that boy know I was followed?" wondered Tracy. "Maybe he will meet me hereabouts and explain. But I don't see him anywhere."

The youth congratulated himself on his escape from another trap, and safe as he thought from the eyes that had spotted him, he moved away.

"Made it, didn't you?" ejaculated a voice at his side. "I told you that you hadn't any time to lose. The fool is on the other street, waiting for you to come out o' the store."

The speaker was the same boy who had warned Tracy.

"Who was after me?" queried the Oriole's young passenger.

"A fellow called Kidd Gauntlet. Do you know him?"

Tracy's reply was an exclamation of surprise.

"The rascal!" he cried. "I did not think the gang would discover me so soon."

"When did you get back, Tracy?"

The ex-dude bent forward and looked into his deliverer's face.

Two sparkling eyes were before him.

"Great Scott! you are the Dodger!" he exclaimed, catching the boy's hand in a thrill of delight.

"It took you some time to catch on, but you got there at last," was the response, as the smile on the speaker's face established his identity beyond question. "Your return is the happiest surprise I've had in a year, Mr. Collins. Of course you haven't been to Australia. You haven't had time to come back from there."

"No. I got out of the trap when I was in mid-ocean."

"Good! I don't want the story now. After the game has been played through I will let you spin it out to any length that suits you. My old friend Kidd was after you, soft-handed,

keen-eyed Kidd Gauntlet, the gentleman who introduced me to the waters of the harbor a week ago."

Tracy's eyes were filled with wonder, and Dodger Dick noticed it.

"It's hard to drown a river-rat they say," continued the young detective. "That is the conclusion Captain Kidd is likely to come to one of these days."

"He tried it on you, did he?"

"He did. But he did not discover that just before he executed his play I had slipped the bracelets, and that I had a good chance for my life. I had a long swim for it, Tracy, in the harbor at night, with the lights of New York like far-off stars, and Captain Kidd pulling back with all his might. I'm afraid I would not have made it if the night patrol-boat had not come along. They dragged me out of the water and landed me safely not long after my friend Kidd touched the pier in Red Rufus's boat."

Tracy could hardly wait for the conclusion of Dodger Dick's narrative, brief as it was, to congratulate him on his escape.

"We've got work ahead, some tough work, too," Dick said, cutting him short. "I haven't been idle all week if I did not give the gang any trouble. I've got to the bottom of the missing hand business."

"That is splendid! Whose hand did I find in the Park, Dick?"

"I will answer you by introducing you to the owner," replied the Dock Ferret.

"Ah, can you do that?"

"Follow me and see. I had just completed a little job when I ran across you with Captain Kidd at your heels. Come along, Tracy."

Captain Jeff's late passenger was willing to follow Dodger Dick wherever he led, and the two youths were soon walking rapidly down the street which had received Tracy after his escape from his pursuer.

Not long afterward they ascended an uncarpeted stair to the third story of a large building, and Dick led the way into the presence of his foster-mother, Mrs. Sturgeon.

"This young gent is all right, mother," explained the Dodger when the old lady had started at sight of Tracy, who was strange to her. "Now, if Nora had not retired—"

He was interrupted by the opening of a door at one side of the room, and a young girl, pale, but beautiful, came forward.

She wore a bandage at one of her wrists, and it took no Hawk's eye to tell that a hand was missing there.

"This is the lady with the missing gripper," said Dick, glancing at Tracy, whose eyes were riveted on the girl. "She ain't living in a palace now, but I guess she's happier to-night than she's been for some time. Nora, this is Mr. Tracy Collins, who first put me on the trail."

The brilliant eyes of the gold-gang's victim had already guessed this, and the next moment she crossed the room and held out her only hand to the astonished Tracy.

"My thanks must be your reward now," she exclaimed. "The time may come when I can fully reward you."

"I am paid already," stammered Tracy, and then he dropped the hand he had taken, and saw a twinkle in the depths of the Dodger's eyes.

CHAPTER XVI. HANDS OF SILK.

"I GUESS the youngster has given me the slip. It was a neat trick, too, one I did not think he was capable of playing. Nobody would help him, therefore all the credit of the play belongs to him."

Thus spoke Kidd Gauntlet, the New York sharp, after he had waited some time in front of the store for Tracy Collins.

He had not seen the youth receive a warning from Dodger Dick, and, as we have just heard him remark, he was prompt to give Tracy all the glory of the clever performance.

When it occurred to Kidd's mind that the ex-dude had probably passed through the building to the street beyond, it was too late to try to pick up the trail, and so the sharper moved off considerably crestfallen over his defeat.

If he could have rediscovered Tracy he would have found the wharf spy, and then he might have shadowed the couple to Mother Sturgeon's, which luck would have resulted in finding Nora.

It was nearly two hours after his ill success as a tracker when Captain Kidd entered the house in B— street.

Braddock Bowman was not at home. In fact the house appeared to have no tenant but himself and he took possession of the easiest chair

and proceeded to enjoy a cigar pending the chief conspirator's return.

"To-morrow night we draw blood for the second time," he muttered between the puffs.

"We've got the right timber this time. No Nora to regret her step a minute after the work was done. I was lucky to find the new Dora. Jupiter! I think I deserve an extra ten thousand or so for my acumen. Stella doesn't take to the new creature very well. I can see that without opening my eyes more than half-way. Somehow-or-other she got wrapped up in Nora. The girl whined her way into Stella's heart. That's about the way of it. Muriel has got to marry her! As the wife of a man like Jeffers, Stella will belong to us forever and the secret will be safe."

Kidd Gauntlet might have continued indefinitely in this strain if he had not been interrupted by the tones of the entrance bell.

This household institution did not ring often at 331 B— street, and the call rather startled the city sharp in the comfortable chair.

"Now, who in the deuce is that?" cried Kidd. "It's none o' our set, for we don't have to jerk the bell, and I never play butler. Let the fellow pull again."

Next moment he heard the bell-call clearer than before, and with an emphasis which he could not afford to disregard.

Kidd started up with a half-suppressed growl, and left the room.

In a minute he was at the front portal, and then he was looking into the face of the person who had disturbed him.

"Are you Mr. Bowman?" asked the man on the step.

"What is wanting?" replied Kidd.

"Mr. Tuscan, the ex-banker, on M— avenue, is very sick. He wants you."

Kidd started.

"Is he dangerous?"

"He don't know. He can't speak—he couldn't when I left, anyhow."

"A stroke, eh?"

"No, sir—a fall down-stairs."

"I will come myself, though I am not Braddock Bowman. I represent the man Mr. Tuscan wants to see."

"Come along, then."

Some exciting thoughts chased each other through Kidd Gauntlet's mind while he was being conducted to the residence of the old man against whom he had plotted with his confederates.

What if Tully Tuscan had met with a fatal accident? That would put an end to the conspiracy, for the scoundrels, with all their bravery, would not dare to keep up the game.

The ride to the ex-banker's home did not occupy much time.

When the vehicle came to a halt in front of the house, Kidd alighted and went up the steps, with many misgivings.

It was the first time he had crossed the Tuscan threshold, although he had seen the millionaire on several occasions.

Nobody met Kidd at the door, and he went on at a venture.

All at once he encountered a man who emerged from a room just ahead. The sport eyed him from the first.

"Walk forward, Mr. Bowman. You will find the old gentleman a little better," the stranger said, waving Kidd to the door.

There was nothing for the city sport to do but to obey, and a moment afterward he stood in a semi-darkened room.

Before him, on a bed, lay the figure of a man, and bending over him was another. The face of the attendant was turned from Kidd.

"Why doesn't he come?" gasped the person on the counterpane. "I want to tell him just what I want done."

At that instant Kidd's footfall sounded in the room.

"He is here now," said the man with the injured banker.

A pair of hands came up and were reached out as if in search of some one.

"Ah! you are here, Mr. Bowman!" exclaimed Tuscan. "Retire, Porter; my friend has come."

Then Kidd felt himself drawn downward by the old millionaire, and the following moment he was listening to rapid words.

"You've served me well, Braddock—the best of all those who tried to find Dora for me," said the banker, who for want of light could not distinguish the features of the man he held in a grip of steel. "I am not going to live to see the child you are bringing back; but when she comes she is to have all which is now mine. They've tried to poison my mind against you,

Braddock; but I knew my friends, ha, ha! I guess they won't give the scheme another trial! You will find in my desk in the other room the keys to the little safe—the opposite corner. Open the safe and fetch me a paper you will find in a locked drawer. Do it quick, Braddock. It is the old will—the one I want to tear up before I go."

Tuscan's hands relaxed their hold at the end of his last sentence, and Kidd drew back.

"If he dies, the game is up!" he thought. "I will never get another chance at the plumage of this golden pigeon. It is the turn of the winning card for me, and the last one in the deck at that."

The New York sport walked into the room designated by the millionaire. He saw the desk and the safe.

The next minute he was at the former, and the lid went up at his touch.

A thrill possessed him as his fingers found a bunch of keys.

It was a good time for Kidd's brain to whirl, but he kept cool.

He went to the small safe, a strong private affair and stooped before the door.

"This is fortune, sure enough!" he mentally exclaimed. "If I don't heel myself in for life, I deserve to serve the State in Sing Sing."

Open flew the safe-door at a pull from his muscled arm.

Kidd leaned forward, his eager eyes on the hunt for riches, and his hand ready to clutch anything that felt like money.

"Hurry up, Braddock!" called a voice from the adjoining room.

At that moment Kidd touched a package of bills. In a second it was in his pocket!

Then another and another followed the first! The New York sharp had found an exhaustless mine."

He did not desist until he heard the voice again.

"For—God's—sake—come, Braddock!"

Then Kidd unlocked a small drawer in the safe, and jerked out the first paper he touched when he put his hand in.

Clutching it tightly, he turned back to the millionaire.

"Here I am, and the paper—this is it," said he, bending over Tuscan who caught eagerly at the document which the villain thrust forward.

An exclamation of joy broke from the old man's throat.

"A thousand thanks, Braddock! We will get a little light now—enough to see by for a moment. I want to make no mistake."

Before Kidd could interpose, one of Tuscan's hands drew aside the curtain of a window beside the bed, and light from a lamp in a recess streamed over the scene.

Then the millionaire looked into the city hyena's face.

"My God!" he cried, as his look became a wild stare. "You are not Braddock Bowman?"

He had partially raised himself but he fell back unnerved and deathlike on his pillow.

"Porter!" he called. "There's a robber—a—"

Kidd Gauntlet darted at the man on the bed like a swooping hawk, and the sentence died when his silken but dangerous fingers caught the unguarded throat.

"I'm better than Braddock Bowman!" he laughed. "I never let a chance escape. Thanks for the opportunity you have given me to acquire a fortune!"

There was no reply. How could there have been one.

Three minutes later Kidd Gauntlet went down the Tuscan steps with the gleam of a triumphant tiger in his eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

DODGER DICK'S STRATAGEM.

WHEN Mr. Braddock Bowman came back to the house in B— street, he resolved to retire at once, which he did.

He knew nothing about the cool trick Kidd Gauntlet had played in his name, and he was not to become aware of it for some time.

The next day he began to wait for Kidd, but the hours passed without bringing that accomplished rascal.

Nor did Jeffers show up.

Bowman grew impatient as he waited.

Once more night was near at hand, and it was the night set apart for the operation which was to rob another young girl of one of her hands for the purpose of carrying out a scheme replete with the darkest villainy.

"I don't think the boy we started to Australia with Captain Jeff can do much, but we

can't afford to let him run at large," muttered Bowman as he saw the street lamps burning again along the sidewalk. "Jeffers about half believes that Kidd failed to drown Dodger, the dock rat, but I don't. I wouldn't be as dead as I think that young trailer is for a world of gold as big as this. Now, if the boys would drop in we'd go to work and turn out a genuine heiress to the Tuscan ducats. Hang them! why don't they come?"

To tell the truth without further concealment Muriel Jeffers could not keep his engagement.

About the hour of Kidd's successful play at the millionaire's house Jeffers was espied by two youths who, not long before, had left Mother Sturgeon's humble abode.

"Keep that fellow in sight. It is Jeffers, the gentleman who escorted you on board the Ocean Oriole. If we get a chance to put the clamps on him it must be done. Jeffers's tongue can be made to wag; but Kidd Gauntlet is a man of another stamp."

It was Dodger Dick who spoke thus to Tracy Collins, and the eyes of the ex-dude got a spirited gleam when he recognized the man who had been sighted.

Off Jeffers went, and the boys after him.

"He is going into Polish Patsy's for a lunch. Ah! we can nab him there!" suddenly continued the Dodger, for Jeffers had stepped into a small but busy little lunch house in the Bowery—where eatables were cheap, but well cooked.

The proprietor was a nervous little Pole, who had fled his country for his own good, and while his true name was known to many, he was universally called Polish Patsy, which was a nickname he rather liked.

Dodger Dick and his companion hastened toward the open door of the restaurant, and saw Jeffers rest himself at one of the tables.

It was the last table in the narrow room, and the city sport had probably chosen it on account of its location.

"I'm afraid we can't handle a big fellow like Jeffers alone," remarked Tracy.

"He is no infant—that is certain. If we give him a chance, we won't enjoy a victory; but as he takes things by force or stratagem, we must do the same."

After a brief council of war on the sidewalk, the two boys advanced, Dodger Dick in the lead with his keen black eyes fixed on Jeffers, whose back was toward the entrance.

Braddock Bowman's man had already given his order, and Polish Patsy himself had served the lunch, as he often did when he had a well-dressed customer, whose patronage he wanted to retain.

Dick and Tracy stopped at one of the tables three removes from the man they wanted. A minute after, a man entered the place and caught the Dodger's eye.

The wharf spy nodded to this individual and saw him take the nearest table.

"We will have help, if we want any," whispered Dick to his friend.

"Who is yon man?"

"That is Captain Coldgrip, the lightning detective of New York. I've helped him more than once, and he's never been slow to acknowledge it, either. If Jeffers shows his teeth, the Broadway sleuth will take a hand in the game."

"By Jove! I'm glad he dropped in," replied Tracy. "I feel that my friend Jeffers is going to show his teeth."

"We will see."

All at once, with a swift glance toward the great detective, Dodger Dick got up and glided toward the man at the last table.

There were the movements of a cat in the young wharfer's advance.

He saw nothing but the man before him.

Tracy hardly knew what to do.

The agreement was that he was to assist in the arrest, but he suddenly lost his head, at it were, and remained in his chair.

Suddenly, Dick stopped at the sport's elbow.

"Good-night, Mr. Jeffers."

In an instant the man looked up.

"Well, what is it?"

He had not recognized the Dock Ferret.

"Don't let me break your lunch. Finish it. I will wait."

But Jeffers was the last man to finish a supper under such circumstances.

"I don't know you," he went on. "What is your business with me? You called me Jeffers, did you not?"

"Yes. I want to tell you that the game is about up."

Jeffers started as if touched by an electric wire.

"What game?"

"The big one you're in now—the Tuscan scheme, of course," smiled Dick.

"I don't understand you. See here! haven't you struck the wrong man?"

"That is something I never do, Jeffers."

"The Old Harry you don't," and the speaker would have left his chair if Dodger Dick's hand had not dropped upon his shoulder.

"Don't make a scene here, Mr. Jeffers," the boy detective said. "We know all about the game. The others have been caught—"

"Great Scott! I guess I know you now."

"I am Dodger Dick."

For a moment Jeffers's look was a wild stare.

"Kidd didn't leave you in the Bay, after all," he exclaimed. "I told the colonel that you were likely to turn up one of these times, and just when you weren't wanted. Do you think you can take me without help, boy?"

"You're not going to give me any trouble, Jeffers," answered Dick, with another glance toward the handsome man, who was taking in the scene two tables distant. "If you could hear Kidd and the colonel give it to you, I don't think you'd try to get away."

That instant the eyes of Jeffers flashed.

"Of course, if I chose, you could not handle a man like me," he replied. "They talk about me, do they? I'll show Brad Bowman that it was born in his brain, and Kidd Gauntlet will yet learn that Muriel Jeffers can't be trod on without danger! Where's your bracelets, Dodger Dick?"

A singular change had come over the face of the man. It was white from rage, and at the end of his sentence, he quietly put up the hands which could have sent the young sleuth flying against the wall.

Dick was not provided with handcuffs.

"I wouldn't put them on you if I had a dozen pair," he responded. "I know there is honor in Muriel Jeffers, and I don't want to see you wear steel before the men who want to pull you down!"

Jeffers got up with a quickness that startled the watchful Tracy.

"Show me the rascals!" he cried. "Let me stand before them! Where are they, Dodger Dick?"

Not until then did Jeffers see Tracy Collins, and the moment he caught sight of the youth, he went toward him with an eager stride.

"So you are back? The colonel said you were, but I could hardly believe it," he exclaimed, leaning toward his victim. "I'm glad you're here, and not on the way to Australia. I hope I didn't hurt you any. I had to do the job—Brad Bowman's job, you understand."

Tracy nodded and assured Jeffers that he was none the worse for his trip to sea.

"Now I'm at your service," the New York sport continued, addressing Dick. "I just want to see the villains who want to throw all the blame upon my shoulders!"

Two minutes later Muriel Jeffers was on the street with the boys.

Captain Coldgrip, at a sign from Dick, had left his table, and was within reinforcing distance at a moment's notice.

The Dodger had played a good card, but it was some distance from the lunch-house to the nearest station, and the bird in the hand might get back to the bush before it was reached.

However, the two boys started off with their prisoner.

"Let me get him across the step, and I'll see that the cage holds him!" mentally ejaculated Dick. "Nothing keeps him with us but his belief that Braddock Bowman and Captain Kidd have denounced him."

Jeffers did not suspect. Eager to confront his fellow conspirators, he marched into the station-house and submitted to arrest.

"Now, show me the squealers!" he demanded.

"When we catch them," grinned Dick.

In a flash the villain saw through the play, and sprung at the young dock detective. But, a man who was his equal, pushed him back and something clicked at his wrists.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CORNERED BY HIS MASTER.

MURIEL JEFFERS in his cell at the station had ample time for reflection.

He saw that he had been cleverly entrapped, but what angered him most was that the trick had been performed by a boy.

He demanded to be released on the ground that there was no proof against him, but he found it easier to get into the station-house than to get out.

In short, he was held and when Dodger Dick left him it was with the assurance that he would

be joined soon by Braddock Bowman and Kidd Gauntlet.

The next day, as we have seen, the head of the conspiracy waited impatiently for the two confederates.

Kidd, with the money he had taken from Tully Tuscan's safe, was not likely to come back, and Jeffers could not.

Meantime the millionaire had become worse, for the excitement produced by Captain Kidd's bold play had brought him very near to death's door, and no one thought he would live through it.

At last Bowman grew tired of waiting.

"Something has turned up," he muttered. "Something unexpected, too. I'll drop down to Tuscan's to see that everything is all right there; then I'll inquire whether Stella knows anything about Kidd and Muriel."

Not long afterward the sleek villain walked up the Tuscan steps and was admitted. A strange cry greeted him as he entered the room where the ex-banker was propped up by pillows.

Bowman stopped and his eyes filled with astonishment.

"Why didn't you come last night?" asked Tuscan, now entirely rational for the first time since Kidd's swoon. "I sent for you, but in your place came a veritable devil, a man who had hands of silk which first robbed me and then left their imprint on my throat. He came from your house, too. My messenger found him there."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Bowman. "Call Joseph in."

Next moment a youth entered the room. It was the messenger who had conducted Kidd Gauntlet from the house in B— street to the ex-banker's mansion.

"What was the man like, Joseph? Tell this gentleman," said Tuscan, waving his hand toward Bowman, who sat spell-bound.

The young man obeyed.

"I know the rascal!" cried the New Yorker, as he recognized Kidd by Joseph's description. "So he robbed you?"

"Yes."

"How much did he take?"

"As near as I can figure now, about twenty thousand dollars."

"I see," thought Bowman. "Kidd saw his opportunity, and thought that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. I don't know but he is right. I am still solid with Tuscan. I will denounce Kidd, but I will take good care not to set the police on the right trail, for I don't want him caught."

Then followed a most adroit story by the chief of the infamous plot.

Bowman said that the man had evidently been waiting for him at his house when the messenger arrived, and that he saw a chance to make a ten-strike by personating him for a short time, and had done so. He believed the man to be a certain villain who had tried to blackmail him on several occasions, and he had no doubt that his last visit to his house was on business of that kind.

To all this Tully Tuscan listened without a word of interruption, as if he was willing that Bowman should have free swing.

"Can't you catch the rascal for me?" he asked at the end. "Next to finding my child, I want to see the fellow behind the doors of Sing Sing."

"I will exert myself in that direction. I will also give the police all information in my power."

"Wouldn't you give me a few pointers now, Mr. Bowman?"

It was in strange tones that this question was couched, and Braddock Bowman had to turn half-way round to see the speaker.

He seemed ready to dart from his chair when he looked at the person who had just stepped from behind a curtain at the foot of Tuscan's bed.

He was confronted by a well-built boy, who had just then a pair of sparkling eyes, and a smile of undoubted victory at the corners of his mouth.

Braddock Bowman appeared to know him.

"I'd like to have the information right away," continued the boy, who was Dodger Dick. "We've got your old friend and helper, Jeffers, the man who takes boys on board ships whether they want to go or not. Then we have Nora, the one-handed girl, where she is safe and comparatively happy. You haven't been to Stella's lately, Mr. Bowman? Well, you might not find Stella there were you to make the visit at this time. Come, now, shall I have all you know about Captain Kidd, who played a twenty-thousand-dollar hand last night?"

"Who is this young cheek?" cried the Gotham sharp, turning to Tuscan, who was watching him intently. "Why have you admitted him to your house to undermine me? He is the same imp who was here once before. They call him Dodger Dick, and he follows people on the wharves for money. He—"

The millionaire raised his hand to check Bowman, but Dodger Dick quickly put in!

"Let him go to the end of the string!" cried the Dock Ferret. "Of course he has no choice words for me, and I want to see how he can spread it on."

Bowman's eyes got a mad flash.

"By Jupiter! I'll wipe the floor of this room with you!" he exclaimed, springing up and starting toward Dick who drew slightly back and then faced him like a young lion.

"I think you will do nothing of the kind," was the cool reply. "If you will inquire, you will find that Mr. Tuscan hasn't the same opinion of you now that he had the other day. The story I have told him has been locked up with proof. Jeffers kept up stiffly until this afternoon, and then, in hopes of saving himself, he made a statement which supplied the links I have been looking for, and completed the chain. Ask the gentleman in bed what he thinks of you, at this time."

Braddock Bowman looked at the millionaire.

"How is this?" he cried, and he spoke through close-set teeth. "Have you allowed yourself to be hoodwinked by this river rat?"

"He has made no statement which he has not proved," was the startling answer. "The girl Nora has sat at my bed and told me her story. She has not been gone an hour."

Despite his assumed calmness, Braddock Bowman went back.

If Nora had talked with Tully Tuscan, the whole game was up.

He seemed to realize this. And he had lost it through the cunning of the boy he called a river rat!

"You have deceived me shamefully, Braddock Bowman," continued the ex-banker. "I am going to live to see you paid in full for your villainy. I am usually lenient, but you have made me merciless. I now believe, for the first time, that my child is dead; but I have found another in her place. Nora, your victim, comes to me maimed for life by your greed for gold. She becomes my heir—just what you wanted her to be, but not a dollar of the Tuscan riches drops into your hands! Now, Joseph, call in the gentlemen who have been waiting for my old friend Braddock."

The cornered scoundrel seemed to realize what was coming, for he turned toward the door with a parting glance at Dodger Dick.

The following moment he was confronted by two stalwart men, who stepped forward with looks not hard to interpret.

"Some day you pay for this!" grated Bowman, flashing the fire of his anger on the boy, who was enjoying the handcuffing with open delight. "They can't hang a man for a trick, and I'll be a free bird before long. Then, look out!"

"All right Mr. Bowman. The next time you concoct a scheme for an old man's money, you don't want to drop any human hands in Central Park!"

There was no reply to Dodger Dick's retort, and then Braddock Bowman walked from the room, escorted by the two policemen, who had waited quietly for the call which it was believed the head rascal's curiosity would prompt him to make.

Of course it was partly through Muriel Jeffers's state's evidence which led the Dock Ferret Detective to Stella, who confirmed Nora's story in every particular, and showed Tuscan, the millionaire, the extent of the plot against him.

As Dick told Bowman, the scheme was up.

Kidd Gauntlet was not permitted to get away with his plunder. He was caught in hiding a day or two afterward, and with Muriel and Bowman, went up the river for a long stay.

Nora, the one-handed, went from Mother Sturgeon's to the ex-banker's home, where she was duly installed as his heir, and where she is to day preparing to become, in a short time, the bride of our old acquaintance, Tracy Collins, whose lucky find in the Park was the means of baffling one of the foulest conspiracies ever hatched in New York.

Captain Jeff never came back from Australia. He feared the law, and kept his distance.

As for Dodger Dick, he was magnificently rewarded, after which he went back to his old stamping-ground, the docks.

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- 128 Kiowa Charley, the White Mustang.
- 139 Judge Lynch, Jr.; or, The Boy Vigilante.
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- 553 Dodger Dick's Desperate Case.
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- 573 The Two Shadows.
- 582 Dodger Dick's Drop.
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